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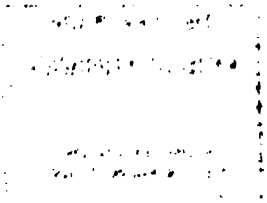

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"One grown cut out ghosts"
(*Page 84*) *Frontispiece*

MARY JANE'S KINDERGARTEN

BY

CLARA INGRAM JUDSON

AUTHOR OF

"MARY JANE—HER BOOK," "MARY JANE—HER VISIT," "MARY JANE DOWN SOUTH," "MARY JANE'S CITY HOME," "MARY JANE IN NEW ENGLAND," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

FRANCES WHITE

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dress (Mary Jane liked blue silk dresses, especially when they had white collars like this one had) stepped out to speak to them. She put one hand out to Mrs. Merrill and with the other she took hold of Mary Jane's free hand and half drew her toward the door. "Is this going to be my little girl for part of every day?" she asked kindly. "I hope so, because I do like to have little girls just like you to help me teach my children."

That very minute, the big, troublesome lump that had been in Mary Jane's throat melted to nothing and she suddenly felt very happy and very sure that this kindergarten was exactly the place where she belonged. She felt so *very* sure about that, that she didn't even listen while Mrs. Merrill told the teacher that her little girl's name was Mary Jane Merrill; that she was past five and that it was high time she was going to school. No, she didn't hear a word of all that. She just looked into the pleasant

sunny room and admired the flowers and pictures and felt comfortable.

So that by the time Mrs. Merrill finished talking to Miss Lynn (for that was the teacher's name) and slipped her arm around Mary Jane to kiss her good-by, Mary Jane had entirely forgotten that she had expected to feel very lonesome when her mother went home. She kissed her mother; hung up her hat and sweater where Miss Lynn told her to, then sat down in a little red chair and watched the other boys and girls come.

It was very interesting to see how many came. There were brown haired girls and golden haired girls and curly headed ones of both colors. And lots of boys, dear me, yes! Every one seemed so happy and comfortable. "I feel like I know them and I don't know them," thought Mary Jane, "just that way, I feel!"

But she did know somebody. For just

before the big bell rang Doris and her mother knocked at the door and it wasn't a minute after that before the two little friends were sitting side by side ready for the good times in store.

As soon as the big bell out in the hall rang, "ding, dong!" Miss Lynn shut the door into the hall and came and stood in front of the boys and girls.

"The first thing we're going to do this morning," she said, "is to tell each other good morning. And we're going to tell it in a song. Let's all say it before we sing it."

"Oh, how do you do,
Oh, how do you do,
Oh, how do you do to-day?
I'm very well
I'm very well,
I'm very glad to say!"

The boys and girls thought that a nice way to say good morning and they sang it and shook hands and made every one feel at home.

Then the teacher told some stories and then there were more songs. Then she and her assistant took down the names of every boy and girl and asked them to tell something they had done that summer.

While the others were talking, Mary Jane tried and tried to think of something she could tell—and she couldn't think of a thing, not a single thing! But the minute it really came her turn, she suddenly remembered about the nest of tiny mice which she had found in the basket in the loft at her grandmother's. So she told about that—all about it; how she left them in their own nest and took them scraps to eat and everything.

After that the morning went very quickly and much too soon Miss Lynn said that it was time to go home.

Mary Jane and Doris walked home together and while they walked, they talked about all the good times they were going to have.

"I like kindergarten," said Mary Jane, when she reached home. "I like every bit of of it, every bit!"

But dear me, she didn't know what every bit of it was! She didn't even guess something that was going to happen at that nice kindergarten before a week passed!

LEANDER'S POCKET

BY the end of the first week of kindergarten Mary Jane had made friends with a number of her mates. There was Helen, the pretty little yellow haired girl who always looked so neat and sweet in her fresh, blue dresses. And Susan Louise, who was tall and slim and very, very, oh, *very* neat and orderly. Susan Louise lived with her grandmother and was not allowed to play with her little friends after school as the other children did because her grandmother was afraid she'd get her dresses mussed or her hands untidy.

Susan Louise had neat, dark hair that was braided into two most interesting pigtails. At least Mary Jane thought they were most interesting. The first day she talked to

Susan Louise she said, "I wish I had hair like yours, all fixed so nice."

"You can," replied Susan Louise generously. "Of course yours isn't as dark as mine and that's too bad, but if you let it grow you can braid it some day." Mary Jane resolved then and there to ask her mother to let her hair grow long.

But the girl Mary Jane found the most interesting of all was Pearl. Pearl was small and jolly looking; she wore bright red dresses and scarlet and pink hair ribbons and was always smiling and—her face was as black as black could be! Mary Jane sat next to her in story time and really, she found Pearl so very interesting to watch that many times she didn't hear more than half the story the teacher told! Pearl wore her hair in tiny pigtails all over her head; Mary Jane tried to count them, but she couldn't count (and be sure she was right) past ten and there were more pigtails than ten on Pearl's round head.

Susan Louise noticed that Mary Jane was watching Pearl very closely so at recess one morning she said to Mary Jane, "What you watching her for, do you like her?"

"Of course I like her," replied Mary Jane loyally, " 'cause she's always so pleasant but that wasn't what I was watching her for. I was wishing my hair was in lots of braids like hers."

"Humph!" said Susan Louise in disgust, "your hair is as long as hers right now—only it isn't in pigtails. Come on over in the corner by the fence here and I'll pigtail it for you."

Now it just happened that if there was one thing more than another that Susan Louise loved to do, it was to fix folks' hair; so she was quite happy. She sat Mary Jane down in an out of the way corner and began to braid. It's not so easy to braid short, brown hair that's been evenly bobbed as Mary Jane's had been; but Susan Louise

wasn't to be discouraged just because a job was hard. She braided and braided and braided and if one tiny, inch-long braid came undone, she promptly did it over again. Till by the time the bell rang for the end of recess, Mary Jane's head was covered with tiny, little bits of braids that stuck out all over her head.

"There, now," said Susan Louise proudly, "you look just like Pearl."

"Do I really?" cried Mary Jane delightedly. "Then I'll look in the teacher's glass as I go by and see my Mary Jane Pearl."

She walked up in the lines and held her head stiff and straight so as not to spoil the braids, and she tiptoed past the looking glass Miss Lynn had hung by the cloak room door. But such a disappointment as awaited her there! Her hair *didn't* look like Pearl's, not even a little bit. The tiny braids were brown instead of black and

didn't stick out from her head as she had hoped they would.

"No, I don't," she said to Susan Louise. "I don't look like Pearl even a little bit. The braids you made aren't like hers a bit. Look!" and she put her hand to her head and rubbed her hair briskly, "look what I can do! I just itch these braids and they come out and hers she itches and itches and itches and they're all right."

Fortunately for Susan Louise, Miss Lynn came back into the room just then and the children had no more time for talk.

Next to Mary Jane at the table where the children played with blocks and cut out pictures sat a little boy whose name was Leander. His hair was always neatly brushed, his nails were always clean and his hands and face looked as though they had been washed just the minute before she looked. He wore a stiff, white, turn-down collar and a big, blue tie and was just as

proper and polite and nice as a little boy could possibly be—when the teacher was near. But Mary Jane had noticed that when Miss Lynn and her assistant were busy on the other side of the room, Leander, for all his nice looks, wasn't a bit better acting than Tom, who many times had grimy hands and who always wore a plain, dark blue waist. Tom had a frank, honest look and Mary Jane, even if she was only five and a half, was wise enough to suspect that he was mussed up sometimes just because he liked to play hard and not because he enjoyed being untidy.

On the second Monday morning of school, Leander whispered to Mary Jane during the opening exercises. "Got somethin' for you!" he said.

Of course that made Mary Jane very anxious to see what he had. She thought about it all during the story and while Miss Lynn was asking questions. She

thought so hard that when Miss Lynn talked about the names of meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner, she didn't hear a word that was said. And, a minute later, when Miss Lynn asked, "What was the name of the meal you ate before you came to school to-day, Mary Jane?" she answered, "Oatmeal," and then she looked around in a puzzled way to see why the boys and girls and teachers laughed.

But with all her wondering and thinking, she couldn't guess what he had.

She waited through the games and stories, through the recess—of course Leander was in the boys' yard and she was with the girls—and then, after recess the time came.

"I just know he'll show it to me when we're sitting at the table," she thought. That was exactly what Leander meant to do.

He sat very quietly and properly while Miss Lynn explained to them that they were

to cut out a pickax from the sheet of paper she gave to each child but Mary Jane could tell by the way he watched his teacher that he wasn't thinking about a thing she said. Mary Jane wasn't thinking about her lesson either, sad to say.

Pretty soon Miss Lynn went over to get a pile of green papers so the children could paste their pickaxes on the green paper to take home. While she was looking the other way, Leander whispered, "I got it in my pocket!"

That puzzled Mary Jane more than ever. She eyed Leander's pocket thoughtfully but it didn't seem to have a thing in it. It was buttoned up tight to his coat and didn't even bulge—that is, no more than if it just had a handkerchief in it.

Mary Jane was so excited by that time that she simply couldn't cut out the pickax to take home. She couldn't think of a thing but that pocket and what it might contain.

Finally, after what seemed a very long time, Miss Lynn had passed out all the green papers and went over to the other side of the room to see if the children at the other table were getting along as they should.

That was just the chance both Leander and Mary Jane were looking for.

"Put your hand in and get it!" he whispered invitingly.

Mary Jane needed no second request. She reached her hand over to his pocket, unbuttoned it quickly and poked her fingers into the dark inside. Nothing there!

"It's in the bottom," advised Leander when he saw by her look that she had found nothing.

So Mary Jane poked her fingers further down—and further down till they found—

"OW-W-W!" screamed Mary Jane suddenly. "OW-W-W!" She forgot about school, that she should keep still and

everything and screamed at the top of her lungs!

Miss Lynn came running to her; Leander tried to take her hand from his pocket but in her fright she only held onto it tighter and screamed the louder.

The other children began to cry and to talk and the room was in such confusion that no one would have guessed it was the quiet orderly room of a minute before.

"Leander!" said Miss Lynn sharply, "what did you give her?"

"I didn't give her nothin'," said Leander innocently, "she just stuck her hand in my pocket."

"Mary Jane," continued the teacher, "take your hand out of his pocket and show me what you have."

Mary Jane slipped her hand out of his pocket even as her teacher spoke but the hand was empty.

"I don't want to show you," she cried, "'cause it bit me—see?"

Miss Lynn looked at the reddened tip of Mary Jane's finger and then said sternly, "Leander! What *have* you got?"

"Girls are fraidies," he replied scornfully. "She was telling all about the mice she had for pets—how'd I know she'd be afraid of just one?" He reached his hand into his pocket and pulled out—a live mouse!

"Take it out of doors," commanded Miss Lynn sternly, "and don't let me—"

But the mouse, that had been so very quiet thus far, seemed to feel that it was about time something was done. He jumped down from Leander's hand onto the table; set the children all to squealing; hopped onto the floor and made for the door. Before any one realized what had happened he was running down the hall toward the basement.

"That's just as well," said Miss Lynn with

a sigh of relief, "and Leander, if you bring another creature into this room, you'll have to stop coming to kindergarten. Mary Jane, did you know what he had?"

"'Deed no!" exclaimed Mary Jane so fervently that Miss Lynn smiled in spite of herself.

"I'm glad of that," said the teacher. "If Leander asks you to put your hand in his pocket again, what are you going to do?"

"I'm not going to do anything," said Mary Jane with a determined shake of her head. "I'm not going to even hear when he asks me, I'm not!"

"That's good," said Miss Lynn. "You may all sit down now, children, and we'll go on with our cutting."

That was the last prank Leander tried to play for many a day.

THE EXPRESS PACKAGE

ONE morning as she was walking to her kindergarten, Mary Jane saw the express man turn the corner at Fifth Street and drive up the street on which she lived. She noticed in particular because he and she were good friends—who wouldn't be good friends with the expressman who had brought the Christmas presents and the birthday presents ever since she could remember? As he drove closer, he spied her walking along the sidewalk, and he waved to her.

"Hello, there, Miss Merrill!" he called when he was within shouting distance (and how Mary Jane did love to be called Miss Merrill!), "you're not going to school?"

"Yes, I am," answered Mary Jane with a little skip of pride and pleasure. "I'm gong

to kindergarten and it's at the same school that Alice goes to, it is—and I go there!"

"Think of that," exclaimed the driver admiringly, as he pulled up at the curb the better to hear. "Can't you run back home now? I've a package for you."

"For *me?*" exclaimed Mary Jane in amazement. "Why it isn't my birthday or Christmas or anything! It isn't even Hallowe'en!"

"Sure enough it isn't," agreed the driver, "but I've a package all the same." He rummaged among the parcels at the back of the seat and pulled out one about twelve or fifteen inches long. "See?" he said, holding it up for her to look at. "It says Miss Mary Jane Merrill, and it has your address all right. Better come back home and see what's inside."

"Oh, I do want to!" exclaimed Mary Jane eagerly, and then she remembered the time, "but I can't 'cause I have to go to school

and when I left I just had time enough—mother said so and it's two blocks back home and, oh, dear, I guess I can't go!"

"'Spect you better not," advised the driver looking at his watch to be sure. "I 'spect you'd better hike right along if you want to get there in time. I forgot all about you being so grown up! Well, I'll leave it at the house for you—'spect it don't amount to much anyway, so don't worry." He picked up the lines he had let fall and drove away.

Mary Jane watched him till he was half way up to her house and then she turned and ran and ran and ran till she got to the schoolhouse. She ran partly because she was afraid that her stopping to talk might make her late; but mostly because she was afraid that if she didn't run and run and run, she might turn back and go home—she *did* want to see what was in that package so very badly!

It was a good thing she did run too, for she got to the school yard just in time. The big bell rang not a minute after she reached the yard and she went up the stairs with the boys and girls—she had never yet been later than first bell and she wouldn't have liked to go up stairs all by herself, no, not even because of talking to the expressman.

Miss Lynn told some very good stories that morning. At least Mary Jane supposed they must be good stories because the other children listened closely and seemed to like them very much. But Mary Jane herself didn't hear one word, not one word. Because she was thinking all the time about that express package. Where had her mother put it? Would she open it? Or would she wait and let Mary Jane open it herself? If Mary Jane hadn't been so excited, she might have remembered that Mrs. Merrill never opened Alice's packages or letters; that she always laid them on the

table by the living room door and that no one was allowed even to touch them except the owner—Mrs. Merrill was very particular about that. But Mary Jane wasn't used to being the one who was away from home and this was the very first package of hers that had come since she started going to school, so it's not so much wonder that she forgot after all.

Yes, all through the stories she thought about her package, all through the games and all the time.

Now it just happened that Mary Jane had never been chosen to be "it" when the game of, "I went to visit a friend to-day" was played and she had always wanted to play that game. But this morning as soon as the game was started, Miss Lynn said, "Mary Jane, you may go into the circle."

While Mary Jane stepped into the middle and the children started singing the words of the game,

"I went to visit a friend to-day,
She only lives across the way,
She said she couldn't come out to play
Because it was her ———"

she tried to think what to do and she couldn't think of a single thing—not a single thing!

The song went on and got nearer to the place where Mary Jane would have to say what kind of a day it was, washing, or ironing or sweeping, and Mary Jane couldn't think of a thing but that package of hers, not a single thing!

Finally the children got all through the song and waited for Mary Jane to show them what to do and *still* Mary Jane couldn't think of a thing but that package that she hoped was still unopened. Suddenly she reached up her hand as though she was taking something off a table and went through all the motions of opening a package. The children could tell what she was doing as plain as day, but they didn't know how to say it in

a song: you can see for yourself that "opening a package" isn't as easy a thing to say as "sweeping" or "ironing" or some such word. But just as they were all staring at each other and wondering what to do, Miss Lynn said, "opening day!" And they all laughed.

"That's a funny one," she added; "let's sing it over again."

"I went to visit a friend one day
She only lives across the way
She said she couldn't come out to play
Because it was her opening day!"

So all the boys and girls, and Mary Jane too this time, sang the song again.

When every one had finished their motions of opening packages, Miss Lynn said to Mary Jane, "What made you think of that, dear? Were you thinking about Christmas?"

"No, I wasn't," replied Mary Jane. "I was thinking about my package. The man

brought it this morning and it's home now and I want to open it and I don't want anybody else to open it, I don't."

"Of course you don't," said Miss Lynn sympathetically, "and I don't believe any one else will open it. I think your mother will keep it safely for you and let you open it when you get home this noon."

That made Mary Jane feel much better and she could think about her kindergarten work just a little. But she still thought about her package the *most*.

So it's not much wonder that Mary Jane hurried home from school just as fast as ever she could hurry. That she didn't stop to walk with Doris or any little girl and that she reached home fully ten minutes before Mrs. Merrill expected her.

She ran around the house and rushed into the kitchen where her mother was working.

"Is it here? Did you keep it for me? Can I open it now? Who's it from?" she

called as she pulled at her sweater in an effort to get it off in a hurry.

"Yes, it's here," replied Mrs. Merrill understandingly, "and I kept it for you, of course I did, dear; you needn't have worried a minute about that! You can open it this very minute. Here, I'll take your sweater and hang it up—you run along and get your package." Then, for the first time, Mary Jane remembered about the packages they had always put on the living room table for Alice.

She ran straight to that table and, sure enough, there was her package. Every string there and her name written right across the front just as the expressman had said.

Mrs. Merrill stopped at the hall table to get her scissors which was a good thing because Mary Jane couldn't pull off all those strings, indeed no!

"Here, take these, Mary Jane," said Mrs.

Merrill, "better not pull at the parcel so, something might break."

"Oh, is it a breaky something?" asked Mary Jane. "Maybe you'd better open it!"

"No, it's yours, you must do it," said Mrs. Merrill. "Come over here to the window seat where you can hold it on your lap."

They both sat down on the big window seat and Mary Jane snipped all the strings and undid the outside wrapper and then the inside wrapper and then the white tissue paper wrapper and there—what do you suppose was there inside those wrappers? A ball of white string (at least that was what it appeared to be) and a lot of loose strands of pink yarn and two long pink sticks (at least that was what *they* appeared to be), long pink sticks with a sharp point like a lead pencil on one end, a pretty little black "bump" on the other end.

Mary Jane just stared at the things that

lay in her lap with puzzled wonder. She was so surprised she couldn't say a single word. All the whole morning to be wondering and wondering and running home and hurrying so. And to find two pink sticks and a ball of string and some pink yarn. Wasn't that enough to surprise a little girl?

Mrs. Merrill understood how she felt but she thought best to wait and see what Mary Jane would say, so she kept very quiet.

Mary Jane looked and looked and then a thought occurred to her.

"Who sent it?" she asked.

"I should have read the wrapper to you," said Mrs. Merrill. She reached down to the floor where the paper had fallen and read from the corner she picked up, "from Mrs. W. D. Hodges."

"Then if my grandmother sent it I like it," said Mary Jane confidently, though she still didn't understand the least mite, "'cause my grandmother knows what I like."

She picked up the two pink sticks, slipped off the little green string that held them together and held them in her hand as though they were chopsticks. Something about the tiny "click" they made as she touched them together put into her head what they were.

"Knitting needles!" she cried happily. "My grandmother sent me knitting needles! I know! I know! That's what they are!"

"That's exactly what they are, my dear," said Mrs. Merrill, "and I was so in hopes you would guess for yourself. Grandmother's needles are black—that's why you didn't guess at first, I suppose. But pink ones are just right for my little girl. I got a letter from grandmother this morning and she said she had sent you some and that the white yarn (you thought it was string but it's white cotton) is to learn on. You can make wash cloths out of it while you practice, grand-

mother says. The pink yarn is for a doll sweater."

Mary Jane wanted to begin work at once, but as the whistles were blowing for lunch and father and Alice would arrive with big appetites in about ten minutes, the knitting class had to wait. But as soon as the lunch work was over, Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane sat down close together and Mary Jane had her first lesson in knitting. So quickly did she learn and so well did she knit that by the end of the week the ball of cotton was made into two fine wash cloths (they were put away for Dadah's Christmas present) and Mary Jane was working on a beautiful pink sweater for Marie Georgiannamore.

"I'm going to work all the time, every day, when I'm not in school," she said to her mother.

But she didn't work *all* the time, dear me no! For if she had she couldn't have enjoyed the surprise that came the next week.

CLEVER ROBBERS

ON Tuesday of the week after Mary Jane started her knitting, Alice came home from school at noon with the announcement that her friends wanted to have a nutting picnic and that they wanted Mrs. Merrill to go with them.

"They say they didn't have a picnic all summer where they had as much fun as our flower hunting picnic in the spring, Mother, and they want you to go and do everything just as we did then."

Every one laughed at that and looked at Mary Jane. For they all remembered how Mary Jane had gone to that picnic and how she had tumbled into the creek and frightened them all nearly to death even though, as it turned out, she had done no more real

harm than to give herself and Alice and Ruth, the girls who had jumped in to pull her out, a good wetting.

"But you know I said I'd never do it again, and I won't," said Mary Jane positively, "and please, Mother, let's have the picnic and let me go."

"You haven't been invited yet," laughed Mrs. Merrill.

"Yes, she has," said Alice eagerly, "the girls spoke of it. They said they'd appoint a committee to carry the rubber boots if you'd let her go."

Mary Jane didn't quite know whether she liked the teasing she knew she would get from the "big" girls but she was sure she liked picnics and if a person had to stand teasing to get picnics, well, she'd stand it, that was all.

"Can I take sausages to cook just like I did before?" she asked. "Can I cook mine all by myself this time?"

"Yes, you may, honey," said Alice kindly. "We liked your sausages before, you remember, and the girls all hoped you'd take some this time. You'll go, won't you, Mother?" she added hopefully.

"To be sure I will," said Mrs. Merrill heartily; "nothing I'd like better this fine weather. I think if we have another frost such as we had last night, the nuts will be on the ground ready for your picking. How do you mean to do about the lunch?"

"Just as we did last spring," replied Alice. "Each girl take her own sandwiches and then enough of some other one thing for the whole party. You wouldn't like to make the cake, would you, Mother?" she added coaxingly.

"You wouldn't like about an inch of chocolate frosting on it, would you?" replied Mrs. Merrill teasingly. "Yes, I'll make you a big cake and you may take a meat loaf such as grandmother taught you to make. Mary Jane may take her sausages—that's

more meat than we take at spring picnics," she explained as the girls looked at her in surprise, "but hungry folks at a fall picnic need plenty of that sort of food. Then let the other girls divide up the cookies and pickles and cheese and anything else they want to take."

So the plans were made and all the week very little else was talked about except the picnic that was to be on Saturday.

When Saturday morning came everybody got up promptly for morning work had to be done, the cake must be frosted (it had been baked at dinner time the night before and was all ready for its tasty trimming) and the thousand and one last things must be attended to.

Mary Jane went to the market; bought the sausages and wrapped them neatly in oiled paper before she put them in her basket. Then she tidied the bathroom washstand and dressed herself all but buttoning

her dress and helped in every way that a little girl her age could help.

So by the time Alice's friends began to come she and Alice and Mrs. Merrill were ready to go.

When every one had come, and "every one" meant nine girls besides the Merrills, the jolly crowd started for the woods. They went across the campus, back of the cemetery, down the banks of Clear Creek; passed the big rock where they had had their spring-time picnic and on down about half a mile farther to a beautiful big grove of nut trees. Here Mrs. Merrill was sure they would find plenty of nuts to fill their baskets.

But somehow, maybe it was because of the bright sunshine and the bracing October air, the matter of eating seemed much more important than hunting nuts and the girls begged to start their fire and have something to eat.

"That suits me," said Mrs. Merrill laugh-

ingly. "I was in such a hurry this morning that I didn't eat half enough breakfast so I have a fine excuse for hurrying lunch."

"I haven't such a good excuse," said Frances, "but I'm hungry anyway!"

So they set to work gathering wood and making the fire.

It was a good thing that they had brought well filled baskets, for really, by the time the fire was made and the apples and potatoes and onions put in to bake, the girls thought they simply couldn't wait another minute. So they had a "first course" of sandwiches and then, when all the goodies were baked and the sausages cooked over the coals, they had a "second course" of potatoes and onions and apples and meat. Last of all, they ate the beautiful big cake—ate it up clear to the last crumb.

"Now, for the nuts," said Ruth.

"Not so fast," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "we have to tidy up our muss. Alice, you and

Frances pick up all the scraps you can find. Ruth, you and Virginia may be stokers and burn up everything Alice and Frances bring to you. The rest of you must tidy up the baskets—fold up the napkins, you know, and make them ready to hold the nuts you gather."

With so many willing hands, it doesn't take long to clear up from even as big a picnic as this had been and in less than ten minutes the grassy spot where they had eaten was spic and span and the girls were wandering off in search of nuts. They left their big baskets under a great beech tree. Then as fast as they picked up enough nuts to fill their skirts, they brought them back and tumbled them into the baskets ready to carry home. Mrs. Merrill thought that was a good plan because it kept any girl from wandering farther from the pary than she meant to go.

Mary Jane gathered nuts too, but she

didn't try to go far—she didn't have to because there was a great walnut tree just a tiny way from the basket and if she poked around among the fallen leaves she could find many a nut under its bare branches.

She liked kicking the leaves and seeing them fly and then poking with her foot for the nuts. She thought it much more fun than wandering all around as the big girls did.

"Don't you let anybody take our nuts!" called Virginia as she tumbled a skirt full into her basket. "You're right near, Mary Jane, so you watch the baskets and don't let anybody touch a single nut."

Of course Mary Jane promised, and she really meant to keep her promise. But playing among the leaves got more and more interesting; she found a fresh new violet blooming down by her feet, under the leaves; she spied a jolly little chickadee

who seemed very anxious to talk to her—so many things to see. So it's not much wonder that she forgot to look back at those baskets as often as she meant to. Anyway, even if she had looked perhaps she wouldn't have seen the robber who appeared the minute her back was turned.

Up in the branch of a nearby tree he had been and he had watched and watched, waiting for his chance. As soon as he saw that Mary Jane was hunting flowers in another direction, he scurried down the tree he had been on, across the dry grass and over to those baskets. A hasty look showed him that feast day had arrived and that if he wanted to lay in a big store for the winter, now was his very best chance. Of course there were nuts a-plenty on the ground but one had to hunt them. Here they were all picked up ready for carrying away. He gave a little squeak of joy—a squeak that was heard by

his little mate who was watching him waiting for a signal, but which was not heard by Mary Jane.

The little mate came hurrying to help and together those two busy robbers carried away the girls' nuts just as fast as they could carry them. Each robber took a nut in one cheek and then a nut in the other cheek and then a nut held tight in between the teeth. Loaded thus, they scampered over to some nearby bushes and poked the nuts into a hole in the ground. They didn't take time to dig a new hole for each nut as such robbers often do. No, they seemed to realize that there was need of hurry. So they simply tumbled the loads of nuts into a hole, poked a few leaves over the top and hurried back for more.

Three nuts, six nuts were gone from Alice's basket; three nuts, six nuts, nine nuts, twelve nuts from Virginia's—and two more robbers arrived on the scene! At that rate it would-

n't be long till every nut the girls had so carefully gathered would be hidden out of sight under the bushes!

But fortunately, before the third pair of robbers had been working long, Frances decided she had all the nuts she wanted to carry and she came back to empty her load into her basket. She found only half the nuts that she had left there!

"Mary Jane! Mary Jane!" she called hastily, "who's been stealing my nuts?"

"Nobody's been stealing 'em," said Mary Jane positively, "'cause I've been right here."

"But they have," insisted Frances, "look! I had about twenty and now there aren't more than ten."

The girls knew by her voice that something had happened and came running to see what the matter might be. From almost every basket, they discovered that some nuts were missing.

"Mrs. Merrill!" they called to Mary Jane's mother who was reading near at hand, "somebody's been stealing our nuts!"

"Surely not!" cried Mrs. Merrill. "Mary Jane or I would have noticed had any one been around because we've been right here." Then she looked at the baskets. "Yes, they do seem to have less," she admitted. "I wonder, I wonder"—and she looked around the trees and bushes.

"There!" she said suddenly as she spied a pair of black eyes looking down at her, "there are your robbers, girls! See how many you can find!"

The girls looked up in the trees and bushes, and counted little red squirrels in plain sight.

"Eight!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill. "No wonder your nuts are gone. Red squirrels such as those are, are the biggest robbers in all the woods—you're lucky not to have lost more! Let's see," and she looked at her

watch, "you have one-half hour more, perhaps if you hurry you can find enough new nuts to replace the ones that were stolen."

"We'll stay here and keep the ones you have," volunteered Mary Jane bravely and she stood right over the baskets and waved a long twig.

When they all trudged home an hour later the girls laughed over the robbers.

"I do think we have the most exciting picnics," said Frances happily. "First we have Mary Jane falling in the creek and being rescued and everything and now we have robbers, lots of them! I want to have another picnic some day and see what happens next."

THE HALLOWE'EN FROLIC

A FEW days after the nutting picnic, Miss Lynn told all the boys and girls to listen very closely because she had a nice surprise to tell them about. So they put their chairs in neat straight rows along by the tables and came and sat down on the floor close up by her where it would be easy for every one to pay good attention to all she said.

"Now, then," she began when every one was settled comfortably, "how many of you like parties?"

Every child raised one hand and some raised two they were so anxious to show her that parties were popular.

"How many of you know what day next Wednesday is?" she continued.

That wasn't so easy and the children

looked at each other in puzzled wonder. Next Wednesday? It wasn't Christmas, no, they were certain sure about that. It couldn't be Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving was the beginning of winter and the beautiful red and gold leaves weren't all off the trees yet—no, it couldn't be Thanksgiving. Fourth of July, that came in the middle of the summer, Decoration Day was before Fourth of July and New Year's Day was after Christmas.

"Next Wednesday—can't you think?" questioned Miss Lynn.

"Haven't any of you noticed the decorations in the windows of the stores?" she asked in a surprised voice.

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Mary Jane suddenly, "I saw them when I was down town with my mother yesterday—they're pumpkin day things 'cause it's—it's—" she hunted in her mind for the big word she wanted, "it's Hallowe'en, next Wednesday is."

"Right!" exclaimed Miss Lynn much pleased, "and what are we going to do about it?"

That seemed a pretty big problem because the children hadn't thought that they might do anything. Till Mary Jane remembered Miss Lynn's first question.

"Could we have a party?" asked the little girl, half hesitatingly.

"If you'd like to," said Miss Lynn in a matter of fact voice just as though having parties was the simplest thing in all the world.

"Oh, we would, Miss Lynn!" exclaimed a dozen children all at once. "We want a party for Hallowe'en; a big for sure party."

"Very well," said Miss Lynn, smiling at their eagerness, "suppose we do! What kind of a party shall we have—a best dress party or a costume party? Which do you think is the most fun?"

Some of the children cried "a costume party" and some looked as though they didn't know what folks were talking about, so Miss Lynn stopped and explained that a costume party was a party where each guest came dressed up to be some one else. Then every one wanted that kind of a party just as Miss Lynn had guessed perhaps they would.

"Do you have things to eat at a costume party or do you just dress up?" asked Tom, anxiously.

"Have things to eat of course!" exclaimed Miss Lynn. "It wouldn't seem like a party if there weren't any good things to eat, would it?"

The children exclaimed "No!" so earnestly that Miss Lynn couldn't help laughing at them—but they didn't mind that, they nearly laughed at themselves!

"How many of you think your mother

will let you bring one apple and one doughnut and two pieces of candy to the party?" asked Miss Lynn.

Every single child held up an eager hand.

"I think she will," said Miss Lynn, nodding approvingly. "I'm sure your mothers will let you because most folks have doughnuts and apples in the house at Hallowe'en time and all mothers know what fun parties are. Now, then, we have lots of things to plan. Would we want to have a party without fixing up our room?"

The children solemnly shook their heads.

"Of course we wouldn't," approved Miss Lynn, "and I'll tell you what we're going to do. See all those piles of things on the table by Miss Amerion?" She pointed over to the supply table by which the pretty assistant, Miss Amerion, stood, and there the children saw piles of curious red papers and orange papers and great sheets of white and

black papers. "Now," continued Miss Lynn, when the children had had a good look, "these next few days we're going to change those piles of papers into witches—great black witches that we'll put onto red cards and hang around on the walls; and ghosts—great white ghosts that will stalk across our blackboard; and cats—big cats and little cats cut from black paper that we can pin on the window curtains; and last and most fun of all we'll make those orange colored papers into pumpkins. Then I guess our room will be dressed up for our party, won't it?"

The children were delighted and wanted to get to work on the decorations at once. But Miss Lynn said there was one thing more to talk about.

"You decided this was to be a costume party, you know," she reminded them, "so now we have to plan what we're going to

wear. How many of you think perhaps your mothers would be willing to make a Hallowe'en costume for you?"

That was a puzzling question and nobody seemed to be very sure what to say.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Miss Lynn, "if any of you think your mother will make a costume you may draw a slip of paper out of that basket over there," she pointed to a little brown basket that stood on the table near Miss Amerion, "and if you are pretty sure she *can't* make you one draw your slip out of the white basket. If you don't know either way, ask mother when you go home this noon which slip you should bring and you can get it to-morrow."

At first Mary Jane didn't know what to do. She had just about decided not to take any paper till she should talk to her mother, when she happened to think that her mother had made several costumes for Alice. Of course Mary Jane knew that if her mother would

make anything for Alice she would be glad to do the same for her little girl. So she proudly slipped over to the little brown basket and drew out a slip. Other boys and girls drew slips too (maybe they had big sisters or brothers and were pretty sure what their mothers would do for them, too) and a good many drew out of the little white basket. Doris's mother was to go away on Sunday to spend a week and although the auntie who was coming to take care of Doris would do everything she could to make the little girl happy, still Doris was afraid that auntie couldn't make Hallowe'en costumes, so she drew her slip out of the white basket.

"Now, then," said Miss Lynn, when every one had drawn a slip or else had decided that they had better wait and ask at home, "you may fold those slips up tight and put them in your pockets. Be sure you don't lose them, you know. The very first minute you get home, give your slip to

mother and tell her all about our party. Then if she can't do what the paper says, you can tell me to-morrow. Miss Amerion, if you'll pass out those white papers now, I think we'll start making ghosts."

A busy morning there was after that! One group cut out ghosts and another pasted queer little witches, that were already cut out, onto red cards and by the time noon had come the room began to look like a party—just that soon!

Mary Jane hurried home from school as fast as ever she could and all the way home she held the precious slip of paper tight, oh, so very, very tight, in her hand.

"You're to read this, Mother, and do what it says if you possib' can!" she said breathlessly as she rushed into her mother's room.

Mrs. Merrill unfolded the crumpled paper and read aloud, "Will you please dress your little girl to represent a pumpkin."

"Why Mary Jane!" exclaimed Mrs. Mer-

rill in puzzled surprise, "what does it mean?"

"It means we're going to have a party—a Hallowe'en party—a real for sure eat-something-dress-up party and please will you make me into a pumpkin?"

Mrs. Merrill put her arms around her little daughter and held her tight. "Indeed I will," she said. "I'll be glad to because I know just how much fun parties are. I'll make you into a beautiful big fat pumpkin with a curlique, green stem on the top—I think it will be lots of fun!"

Then Mary Jane told her all about the doughnut and apple and two pieces of candy she was to take and about the plan for trimming up the room.

"We'll go down and get the stuff for your costume this very afternoon, Mary Jane," decided Mrs. Merrill, "because there isn't much time and I want it to be just right."

And certainly it was "just right" if ever a

costume was! It was made of crêpe paper in three shades of orange and two shades of green. The long, outstanding petticoats, three of them, were made of orange—the darker shade on the outside. The waist was of orange with a tiny, saucy little over jacket of stem green and a cunning little cap with a stiff, thick stem perched on Mary Jane's brown hair.

On the morning of the party the whole Merrill family got up early so that they might help Mary Jane get dressed. Of course they had breakfast first; then Mrs. Merrill brought the dress to the broad window seat in the dining room and she and Alice got the little girl into it. Father didn't do much but admire to be sure, but they let him put the cap on at the last minute and he declared that that cap was the most important part of the whole costume!

When Mrs. Merrill had looked the little girl over to be sure that every skirt and

frill was exactly as it should be, she folded Alice's rain cape around the little pumpkin lady (a coat would be likely to tear the paper dress) and Mr. Merrill drove her to school so she wouldn't get mussed up. Alice went along of course, to take off the cape when they got to school. Mrs. Merrill was to come a little later to see the fun.

A big, jolly party such as was assembled at the school when she reached there, Mary Jane had never seen before. It took her several minutes to discover that the tall, slim witch who carried a broom in her hand was really Susan Louise; that the black cat who had such fierce, out-standing whiskers was only Tom and that the boy who had dozens of strings of yellow corn dangling from his shoulders was her next-seat mate, Leander. But there they were, dressed up and jolly as could be!

There seemed to be something going on in the cloak room and the children out in

the big room were beginning to be curious about strange sounds that came from behind the closed door, when out from that tiny room came a dozen "ghosts" all wrapped in mysterious white. Kind Miss Lynn had told each boy and girl whose mother could not make a costume to bring a big sheet to her. There in the cloak room she and Miss Amerion had pinned those little folks into wonderful ghost costumes made out of —just plain, everyday sheets. And, as everybody knows, a Hallowe'en party isn't anything without plenty of ghosts.

When the tardy bell rang the mothers who had come to visit took the chairs that were arranged along the side of the room and the party began.

There were songs—Hallowe'en songs and autumn songs; games, the jolliest ones the children knew; and then all the ghosts and Hallowe'en folk gathered around the biggest table to eat the goodies they had brought.

Miss Amerion put all the apples on a great copper tray and let two "ghosts" pass it around the table. Miss Lynn arranged all the doughnuts in a basket and put all the candy on a plate—a great, big plate it was for there was lots of candy—and she let Mary Jane pass the doughnuts and Susan Louise and Doris together pass the candy. Then Miss Lynn brought out from her closet, where she had put it before the first girl or boy arrived that morning, a great, piled up basket of popcorn which she passed and passed till every scrap was eaten up.

After that the children played more games, Hallowe'en games this time and the one they liked the best, Miss Lynn called "Does the Ghost Walk?" To play it the children made a big, big ring by stretching their hands just as far as possible. When the ring was thus formed, hands were dropped and that left a big ring with a space between each child. Next the teacher chose one to be

"ghost" and he stood in the middle of the circle. Then all the children together repeated a little verse

"Can you tell me, please I pray,
Walks the ghost this holiday?"

And as soon as the verse was finished all the children, except only the "ghost" in the middle, shut their eyes tight and put their two hands over them. While the eyes were all covered the "ghost" tiptoed around the circle. The point of the game was to try and guess *when* the "ghost" stopped walking. As soon as any one *thought* the "ghost" had stopped walking around the circle, he was to shout, "Walks not!" and if he was right, he could be "it"; and if he was wrong, he had to leave the circle.

Of course lots of little folks made mistakes, that was easy to do, because the "ghost" walked so very softly that it was

easy to imagine he had stopped long before he had, and by making the mistake they had to drop out of the ring. In that way the circle grew smaller and smaller till at last only Doris and Tom and Mary Jane and Pearl were left—Pearl was the ghost that time. She tiptoed so very, very softly on her thin little shoes that Doris and Tom were *sure* she had stopped. They shouted, "Walks not!" at the top of their voices while Pearl was still tiptoeing around the room! That made Mary Jane win the game and Miss Lynn had all the girls and boys clap for Pearl and her.

Just then the going home bell rang and the party ended.

Mary Jane and her mother walked home together and they talked every bit of the way about what a wonderful party it had been.

"I just know I won't want to talk about

another thing not any time ever!" exclaimed Mary Jane with a sigh of happiness as they turned in at her yard.

Mrs. Merrill didn't say anything, but if Mary Jane had seen the smile that came over her face, she'd have guessed that her mother knew something that she *would* want to talk about—very soon!

But Mary Jane didn't see.

She and her mother went into the house and up the stairs and there took off the wonderful pumpkin costume and put it carefully away in a big box labeled "Mary Jane's pumpkin costume." They put the box on the top shelf in Mary Jane's closet where they could easily get it if Mary Jane wanted to wear it again.

"Slip on your play dress and come down as soon as you can," said Mrs. Merrill as she started down the stairway, and then, for the first time, Mary Jane suspected that a surprise was in store for her.

She slipped into that play dress so quickly that she was at the foot of the stairs by the time her mother reached the living room door.

"Sit down in the big chair, dear," said Mrs. Merrill smilingly, "I have something to read to you that I think you will be interested in." She took an envelope from the living room table, opened it carefully and drew out a big fat letter. All the time she was doing it, Mary Jane tried and tried to guess what that letter would say. But if she had tried all day, she never would have guessed the words her mother read!

THE DRESS-UP QUEEN

"WHO'S it from?" asked Mary Jane eagerly as her mother glanced up to see if she was ready to listen.

"Wait till I start reading and see if you can guess," laughed Mrs. Merrill.

"My dear Granddaughter" (the letter said), "I have thought of you so often this fall and have wished and wished that I could see my little girl."

"Grandmother Hodges!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "that's from my Grandmother Hodges! I know because she called me her 'little girl' all the time I was at her house this summer."

"Good guess!" replied Mrs. Merrill. "Now listen and see what she has to say. 'It is too cold to ask her to come and visit us this time of year and anyway, I suppose that now

she has started kindergarten she wouldn't like to stop.' "

"No, I wouldn't," said Mary Jane interrupting the reading.

" 'So I'm wondering if you would let us come and see her at your house. Our house can be shut up and Mr. Teil, who you remember lives the second house down the road, will look after our pets, the chickens and ducks and cows and lambs, for two or three days if we go away. Let me know what you think of it.' "

"We'll let her know to come, won't we?" said Mary Jane happily.

"Indeed we will," replied Mrs. Merrill warmly, "I've already written to her—just a line that I mailed on the way to school and I'll write a longer letter this afternoon. But you'll be interested in the rest of the letter." And indeed, Mary Jane was. For Grandmother had written all the things she knew Mary Jane would want to know about

—the cow and pigs and the pet lamb and the chickens and ducks and every creature Mary Jane had made friends with during her summer visit. She also told of seeing Frances Westover, the little friend Mary Jane liked so well.

Mary Jane was so pleased and interested in the letter that she couldn't help wishing she was a big girl and knew how to write. She would like to answer back and tell her grandmother all the things she thought of to say.

By the time the letter was finished it was twelve o'clock and Mary Jane and her mother had to hurry to get lunch for Mr. Merrill and Alice. Of course, while they were eating, Mrs. Merrill read the letter again so everybody could know the good news that grandfather and grandmother were coming to visit.

"I'm going to ask them for Thanksgiving," said Mrs. Merrill, "because then the girls

will be home for four days and we can all have a jolly time. I'll write this afternoon and tell them to come just as soon as they can."

"Good!" said Mr. Merrill, "but there's one thing that puzzles me, I had a pumpkin lady for breakfast this morning—and now where's she gone? Didn't you have the party after all?"

Mary Jane looked at him blankly. Then she remembered.

"Why, of course, we did, Dadah!" she exclaimed. "We had a beautiful party and everybody looked so funny and we had lots to eat and popcorn besides and it was such fun—only I was thinking 'bout my grandmother's letter, that's why I forgot."

She told him all about how her friends were dressed; the ear of corn boy and the ghosts and the cats and witches and everything and when she finished he agreed with her that it must have been a success.

All that afternoon Mary Jane stayed around near her mother and talked about grandmother's visit—she cared much more about that than she did about the party that was passed and gone. She mailed the long letter that Mrs. Merrill wrote and she helped plan about whose room the visitors should have and what should be cooked for the Thanksgiving dinner.

The next afternoon, she talked more about the same things—over and over again. Till really, by Friday afternoon, Mrs. Merrill couldn't think of a single thing that hadn't been planned and planned and planned.

Finally, by the time Alice got home from her school, Mrs. Merrill was almost tired of planning. When she saw Alice come in and toss her books onto the couch she said, "I do wish, dear, you'd interest Mary Jane in something besides grandmother's visit.

She can't think of anything else and it's full three weeks away yet. The child doesn't enjoy her dolls or her knitting or playing out of doors or anything—she only wants to talk about that visit!"

"Don't you worry, Mother dear," said Alice as she gave her mother a bear-hug, "we'll fix her! Frances and Ruth are coming over to play dress up; they'll be here in about ten minutes. We'll let Mary Jane play with us and you know she likes *that!*"

Mrs. Merrill did know; she knew that there was nothing Mary Jane enjoyed more than dressing up—especially when she played it with the "big girls." She waited till the visitors came; gave them a big plate of cookies and a basket of apples and started them up to the attic playroom and then settled down to write some much neglected letters.

Up in the attic the girls perched on boxes

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or old chairs and ate up the cookies and apples—every crumb and bite clear to the cores.

"Now, then," said Frances as she carefully picked up the crumbs that she had dropped into her lap and ate them neatly, "what shall we play?"

Ruth turned her apple core this way and that to be sure there wasn't another bite; then she dropped it into the basket and replied, "Let's be ladies-going-shopping."

"All right, if you like," answered Alice, "but that's what we played last time, you know."

"So it was," said Ruth, "I'd forgotten. Well, what shall we be?"

"We might dress up as babies," suggested Frances.

"Haven't enough white dresses for all of us," replied Alice.

"Then let's be queens and grand ladies

and courtiers," said Frances. "I think that's about the most fun of all anyway."

"Can I be lady too?" asked Mary Jane anxiously.

"Indeed you shall be lady," replied Frances heartily, "unless you'd rather be queen."

"Oh, I would! I would! I would rather be queen—lot's would I rather!" exclaimed Mary Jane happily. "May I really?" She jumped down from the box she had been sitting on and danced around gayly. "Do we begin now?"

"This very minute," said Alice and she pulled the cover off the "dress-up" box and began hunting for a queen dress.

Mrs. Merrill kept a big box up in the attic in which she put discarded clothing of all sorts, clothing that was not good enough to give away to some deserving person. Then in another, smaller box close by, she put

paper favors from parties and worn out trinkets and any little odds and ends such as accumulate around a house and which she thought the girls might use for their play. So whenever the girls went up there to play they were always sure to find something interesting to play with.

Ruth and Alice pulled out the contents of the clothing box and Frances dumped the box of paper things onto the floor so she could be sure to see everything it contained.

"Here's a long blue silk petticoat—how's that for a queen's robe?" asked Ruth.

"This silver spangled jacket would just go with it," suggested Alice as she held up a much tarnished, but very much prized bolero jacket.

"Fine!" exclaimed Frances, "and look at the gold paper I've found! It won't take two minutes to make a crown and a scepter—you just see!"

Alice pulled Mary Jane over to her, tossed

the blue petticoat over her head and draped it carefully till she got it short enough in front so that the little queen could walk and long enough in back to make a creditable train. Then Ruth adjusted the jacket and by that time Frances had the crown ready to put onto her head.

"There, now!" exclaimed the girls delightedly, "there's our queen!"

They set Mary Jane up on a high box that they covered with an old rug and then they began to dress themselves.

Frances put on a velvet jacket, a small black hat onto which she pinned a long red feather and she fastened an old red tablecloth to her shoulders by the corner.

"What do you think of your courtier?" she asked Mary Jane, as, picking up a stick for a sword, she strutted up and down in front of the queen.

"I'm chief lady-in-waiting," said Ruth as she flounced around in a rustling brown

dress (much too big) and a gorgeous black hat that insisted on slipping to one side of her head.

"And behold your queen mother!" said Alice as she appeared from behind a big box where she had been dressing.

The girls looked at her and burst out laughing—even the little queen laughed so hard she could hardly keep from slipping off her throne. Indeed the "queen mother" *was* a sight to make folks laugh. Alice had tied two pillows around her already plump self and over those had put a green silk skirt, a black shawl and an embroidered "stomacher" (that had been a table cover a year or so ago!). On her head she wore a large straw hat to which she had pinned a dozen or more of the biggest flowers, both paper and cloth, that she had been able to find. No wonder the girls laughed —who wouldn't?

After the courtier and the lady-in-waiting

and the queen mother had paid their respects to the little queen, she stood up to make them a speech.

"Thank you so much," she began, and then she looked off across the attic, hoping she would get an inspiration (for to tell the truth Mary Jane didn't know for sure just what a really-for-true queen would say under such circumstances!). As she looked the expression on her face changed quickly from fun to fright and horror. She stood motionless for a second and then, with one terrified scream, she gathered up her train, jumped down from the box and raced down the stairs.

The big girls were so startled that they didn't collect their wits enough to speak till she was out of sight. Then they looked over at the side of the room where Mary Jane had looked; not a thing out of the ordinary did they see. They stared at each other in blank amazement till another scream from Mary Jane and a hurried running around down

stairs made them realize that something really truly had happened.

Without a word to each other or a thought of their queer clothes, they too, turned and dashed down the stairs.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST

BY the time the big girls reached the main floor of the house it was deserted. No mother, no Mary Jane, no Amanda.

"They've not been gone long, we know that," said Frances, "and I'm sure I heard a phone click as we came downstairs."

"Let's look again," suggested Alice, "there hasn't been time for them to go any place since Mary Jane came downstairs. Anyway, why would they go away? Let's look in every room."

They looked through the living room again —nobody there. They looked in the dining room and were just about to pass on out through the butler's pantry to the kitchen when Ruth, who happened to be nearest the

window, screamed, "Look! Girls! Look! That's what she saw!"

The girls rushed to her side and looked out of the window and such a sight as met their eyes! No wonder Mary Jane had screamed! The roof of the Dana house, next door, was in flames! Mrs. Dana, holding Doris tightly by the hand ran out of the front door just as the girls looked and Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane and Amanda stood by the front steps.

"She saw it through the attic window!" exclaimed Alice, understandingly, "and we couldn't see it 'cause she was higher than we were. Let's go and help!"

All four girls had started for the door as Alice spoke and a second later were with Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane and the others in the front yard.

"What shall we do? Can't we help?" cried Ruth.

"Yes, you can," said Mrs. Merrill who

seemed so calm that the girls lost half their fear. "You may take the two little girls over into our yard. They may stay where they can see everything, but they *must* be as far away as our yard—remember!"

"But oughtn't we take things out of the house, Mother?" asked Alice, as she took Mary Jane's hand snugly into her own.

"No, that's no work for us," said Mrs. Merrill positively, "the firemen are coming, hear them? Thanks to Mary Jane, I got them early! They will know just what to do and how to do it. Our chief business is to keep out of their way. Run quickly!"

The girls scurried away—and none too soon either for much quicker than you can read about it, those skillful firemen had run a line of hose across the yard just where the girls had been standing. Two men held a ladder; a third took the hose and climbed up to the roof; another took a big, shining tank (which the girls afterwards learned held

chemicals for putting out fire) and ran into the house and up the front stairs; while still others brought more hose and more ladders and more shining tanks.

All the while they were working, and working, and working a big crowd was gathering on the street and sidewalk. Mr. Dana and Mr. Merrill, who worked in the same building, heard the news and came hurrying home as fast as Mr. Merrill's machine could bring them and boys and girls and grown-folks assembled in the twilight till there was the biggest crowd that quiet part of the city had ever seen.

But fortunately for the Danas, the fire didn't last long. Even before Mr. Dana and Mr. Merrill had reached home, the flames had died down and the firemen were beginning to roll up a few lines of hose that they saw would not be needed.

Mr. Dana hunted up the fire chief and thanked him for his prompt, good work.

"You don't need to thank me," said the chief modestly, "thank the folks who sent us the alarm. If we had come three minutes later we couldn't have saved your house—no, no matter how hard we might have worked! As it is, you have only a corner of your roof burned—even your second floor isn't hurt except for the wetting."

"I'd like to thank them," said Mr. Dana. "Who sent the alarm?"

"Some lady," replied the chief, and he went off about his business.

"Did you send the alarm?" asked Mr. Dana of his wife who stood near by.

"No," she replied, "I didn't even know the house was a-fire till Mrs. Merrill rushed in here and told us to run. She sent the alarm in even before she came over here. She must have seen the flames from her window."

So Mr. Dana hunted up Mrs. Merrill to thank her before he should start the work of straightening up his house.

"Don't thank me," she said laughingly as he began to tell her how grateful he was for her help, "I only telephoned in to the fire department and then came over here—just what anybody would do you see. It was Mary Jane who discovered the fire. You may thank her—though I haven't as yet had time to ask her how she discovered it."

Mr. Dana turned to the group of little girls who were standing near the edge of the Merrill yard.

"If Mary Jane's there," he began.

"Yes, I'm right here," said Mary Jane, who had heard what her mother had said, "but I didn't do anything. I was just a queen lady and I stood up to make a speech and I looked out of the attic window and then I saw it—the fire I mean—and then I ran down and told my mother and that's all."

"My thanks to you just the same," said Mr. Dana, "and the next time you have a

dress-up party as fine as this" (and he made a bow to the folks whom he now noticed had on silks and satins and court finery) "you're to let me know and you shall have ice cream for everybody!"

After that the girls went into the house to take off their finery for it was now past time for the big girls to go home. Mrs. Merrill went over to help Mrs. Dana tidy up her home.

When she came home a half hour later she reported that Doris's room was the only room that was really damaged—except, of course, the attic. She invited Doris to spend a week with Mary Jane while the room was being fixed up.

"Your mother said that there was plenty of room in your house, dear," said Mrs. Merrill to Doris, "but I told her that made no difference. We want some visitor so much, don't we, Mary Jane," she added, "and if you'll stay we'll like it very much. Suppose

you two girls run over and get Doris's little grip. I packed it for her but I thought she would like to get it herself so she could tell her mother good-by."

The two little girls ran across to Doris's house, got the grip and told Mrs. Dana good-night. And really, when Doris saw all the muss and wet that was left after the fire, she was so glad she had a nice, clean, warm place to stay till home should look natural again. Luckily Snowball had been sent to the country for the winter only the week before so he missed the excitement and danger of the fire.

Mary Jane had never had a little friend come to stay all night before and she thought it lots of fun. After dinner was over father played with them till bedtime and then mother went up stairs with them and helped Doris undress and then read them a story till both little girls were sound asleep. So Doris didn't have time to think of the fire at

her house—she didn't have a minute for such a thought or for being homesick!

For her part, Mary Jane had no time to think about how long it was till Thanksgiving. For as soon as they got up in the morning, the two little girls talked till they had breakfast and talked all the way to school and all the way home and they played together most happily all the afternoons.

One of the afternoons they had a real dress up party. Both little girls were queens and sat on the big throne box, just where Mary Jane had been sitting when she discovered the fire. The big girls were ladies in waiting and courtiers and Amanda and Mrs. Merrill served the cake and ice cream kind Mr. Dana had remembered to send. It was lots of fun.

Another afternoon Mr. Merrill took both little girls with him on a trip he had to make into the country. They got nuts and pumpkins at a farm house and they ordered

more to be sent for the Thanksgiving dinner.

So the week that Doris stayed went by very quickly and on Thursday evening she packed up her grip and went back home to her own, freshly cleaned and papered room. Then poor Mary Jane was lonesomer than ever—and the calendar said two whole weeks till Thanksgiving!

MARY JANE'S PUDDING

HOW Mary Jane ever got through those next two weeks, she never could tell. It really seemed as though Thanksgiving never, never, *never* would come! NEVER! She knitted two handsome white and pink wash cloths to give to her grandmother; she set her room in order every single day and then changed it all around in what she thought might be a better fashion when the next day came around, and she planned and planned and *planned* all the things she and her grandparents would talk about and do.

All the time at kindergarten they were making Thanksgiving things, paper turkeys, and paper pumpkins and paper pies and paper plum puddings and learning Thanksgiving songs and everything—no wonder

Mary Jane was continually reminded of the day!

But time does pass if you wait long enough —there's no doubt about that. Finally, just about the time Mary Jane had nearly given up hope, the last Saturday before Thanksgiving arrived.

"Couldn't we cook the turkey this day?" she asked her mother after breakfast.

"Listen to the child!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill. "I must find you something to do to-day! Suppose we make a big batch of hickory nut cookies and put them away in a jar for Thanksgiving tea? I'll crack the nuts at once and you may pick out the meats while I do the ordering for to-day and to-morrow. Then we can make the cookies together. Would you like that, dear?"

Mary Jane said she would. So as soon as the breakfast work was finished (for of course Mary Jane always helped with that, dear me, yes!) Mrs. Merrill took the sack of

hickory nuts out on the stone back step and cracked a bowlful. Then Mary Jane climbed up into a comfortable big chair, pulled close to the kitchen table and set to work.

If you've ever picked hickory nut meats—enough for a big batch of cookies that is, you'll know just how long Mary Jane worked. But she didn't mind that, not a bit! She felt happy to think she was doing something for Thanksgiving Day.

Fortunately Mrs. Merrill was ready to make the cookies just as Mary Jane had the cupful of nut meats ready. Mary Jane greased the pan with a neatly folded paper and floured the cookie board and helped every way she could. As fast as the big pans of beautifully browned cookies came out of the oven she lifted out the cookies, one by one, with the pancake turner and laid them oh, so carefully, on a spread-out tea cloth. Then, when they had all been baked

and had had time to cool she was to put them in the cookie jar ready for Thanksgiving.

Mary Jane did love to help cook, there was no doubt about that! She took those good-smelling, brown cookies out of the pans just so carefully and put them in neat, orderly rows on the cloth. She got out the cookie jar, dusted it and laid oiled paper in the bottom. Then (and she thought this the most fun of all!) she put the cookies in—six cookies to a row and then a piece of oiled paper, then six more cookies and so on till the jar was well filled.

"There, now!" she exclaimed with a happy sigh when the last was in its place, "they're all ready, Mother. Will you please put the jar away? What do we do next?"

"I think Alice must be through with her practicing now," replied Mrs. Merrill as she glanced at the clock. "Run see if she isn't, dear. And, if she's through, tell her to come

out here and to bring a pencil and a writing pad with her."

"This is going to be fun, I *know!*" exclaimed Mary Jane happily and she darted out of the kitchen on her errand.

It wasn't two minutes till Alice was back with her—pencil and pad in hand.

"You wanted me to write down something for you?" asked Alice.

"Yes, I do," replied Mrs. Merrill. "I thought it would be fun for us three to plan out all the things we are going to have to eat on Thanksgiving Day and to write them down. Then I'll be sure, *sure* not to forget anything. Of course Mary Jane and I have everything planned—at least we think we have. But you can never tell for certain till it's down in black and white."

"May I tell her what to put?" asked Mary Jane eagerly.

"Yes, if you can remember," said Mrs.

Merrill and she couldn't help smiling at the little girl's eager interest.

"We are going to have turkey and mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie," recited Mary Jane, "and turkey and nuts and pumpkin pie and cheese and mashed potatoes and turkey and candy and turkey and—and pie and—and—turkey—and—and—what else is there, Mother?"

"Quite a good deal else," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "and not so many turkeys, please, if *I* have to pay for them!"

"Why we don't have *many* turkeys, Mother!" exclaimed Mary Jane in surprise. "We have only one but it's a great big one, oh, a great big, big one!"

"I'm sure it will be," said Mrs. Merrill, "because father will see to that; you know he has ordered it. I was afraid from the way you talked, Mary Jane, that you expected me to buy one for every day they would be here! Now, Alice, suppose we

put down some of those good things Mary Jane said. Write, turkey and dressing—that's to remind me to have the materials for dressing ready on Wednesday, you see, girls. Then potatoes, turnips, cranberries, cabbage and salad—like apple salad, girls?"

"Goody! Of course we do, Mother!" exclaimed Alice and she wrote it down as fast as ever she could.

"Pumpkin pie, plum pudding, nuts, candies and coffee—that sounds like plenty, doesn't it?" asked Mrs. Merrill as she bent over Alice's writing and saw all that was put down.

"It's only half past ten, Mother, so what do we do now?" asked Mary Jane.

"Listen to the child!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill in dismay, and then a happy thought occurred to her. "Mary Jane," she announced suddenly, "I believe you could make the plum puddings! Would you like to?"

"Would I? Oh, *Mother!*" cried Mary Jane, "let's begin right this minute!"

"Very well," said Mrs. Merrill, "you get the cookbook so we can see just what to use. But remember, Mary Jane, if you make the puddings, *you* make the puddings! I'll tell you what to do, but I won't help one little bit—you'll have to do it all yourself."

Mary Jane was so impressed she could hardly believe what her mother said—*she* make the puddings! *She*, a little girl only five and a half (nearly) years old make the important Thanksgiving puddings all by *herself!* But she had learned that what her mother promised could always be done so she hurried to the pantry for the cookbook, eager to begin work. (What *would* grandfather Hodges think when he found his little girl had made the puddings? Wouldn't it be fun to tell him!)

She found the cookbook and brought it to

her mother who spread it out on the table in front of them.

"Now the first thing you do, Mary Jane," said Mrs. Merrill, "is to get the pudding pans. You know those three little pans that look like baking powder cans?" Mary Jane nodded. "Get those down from the shelf, dust them out and grease them well just as you do the cookie pans. Then get out the mixing bowl, the can of molasses, the raisins and the flour before you call me." Much to Mary Jane's surprise, her mother left the kitchen and went into the living room.

"I guess she thinks I can do it all myself," said Mary Jane wonderingly, "and I guess I can, too, I guess I can."

She got out the pans, greased them as she knew how to do so well. Got out the materials as her mother had told her and then she happened to think of something.

"When I cooked at my grandmother's, I dressed to be a cook. I'm going to, now, too, I am." She hurried out of the kitchen and up the stairs to her father's room. There she found a handkerchief; twisted it around her head and pinned it in place with four big pins.

"Why, Mary Jane!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill who happened to pass along the hall just as Mary Jane was admiring herself and her cap in the glass, "I thought you were working in the kitchen!"

"I am," laughed Mary Jane, "only I'm fixing a cap. See, Mother dear?"

Mrs. Merrill looked and admired just as Mary Jane had hoped she would, then she helped fit the cap on the little girl's head so it wouldn't need so many pins.

"Now we'll make the pudding," said Mary Jane with a sigh of satisfaction and together they went down stairs to the kitchen.

Mrs. Merrill showed Mary Jane just how

to measure the molasses (and it's no easy matter either as you'll know if *you* have ever made a plum pudding yourself!). She told her how many raisins to measure and how much flour and everything and waited till Mary Jane had everything measured out and standing in little cups and bowls on the kitchen table.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Merrill, "we'll put them in a row like this. The molasses first because it goes in the bowl first, then the salt and then the soda and then the buttermilk and the flour and the raisins—see what a big parade it makes. You'll know just what to put in your mixing bowl because you always take the next thing in the kitchen table parade. Isn't that a good scheme?"

Mary Jane thought it was and she was so eager to begin that she could hardly wait till her mother got through talking. Mrs. Merrill was afraid that if she stayed in the room Mary Jane would ask questions that were

not necessary so she went into the living room and finished her darning and Mary Jane made the pudding. She stirred the dough till the lumps were all gone and till it looked just like mother's pudding dough always looked.

"Mother!" she called from the kitchen door when she was sure it was ready to bake, "what do I do next?"

"Put it in the pans, dear," said Mrs. Merrill and she dropped her work and hurried to the kitchen. "That looks fine!" she said approvingly as she tested the smooth dough. "Now put it in the pans a spoonful at a time—careful not to spill and lose any!"

Mary Jane spooned it out oh, so very carefully and made each pan hold just the same as each other pan and while she did that, Mrs. Merrill got the big steamer ready and together they put the pans in and started them on their three hour cooking.

"Now!" said Mrs. Merrill as she turned

the gas low and covered the steamer, "you must run out and play, Mary Jane! Run over and get Doris—see, the sun is shining and little girls who have been cooking all morning need some play before lunch. Lay your cap and apron in the pantry, slip on your sweater; take these two apples, and skip!"

Mary Jane, with a glance of pride at the steamer, skipped.

THANKSGIVING DAY

MARY JANE half opened her eyes and looked around the sleeping porch. It was dark, oh, very dark, it must be at least the middle of the night; mother was sound asleep; Alice was sound asleep and Mary Jane was just about to turn over and go to sleep again herself when a rooster a block away crowed lustily.

That made Mary Jane sit up straight in bed. Not that a rooster's crowing was so unusual, dear me no, for Mrs. Brown's roosters crowed every morning of the world! But Mary Jane knew that they didn't crow *till* morning and she also had a feeling that for some reason or other, she wanted to waken early on this particular morning. So she sat up in her bed and looked around more carefully. Sure enough, she saw some-

thing that she had missed before—father's bed was empty! His getting up must have aroused her.

The minute she saw his empty bed, she remembered everything. This was Thanksgiving Day and father was getting up early to go to the train to meet grandfather and grandmother Hodges! Of course!

Mary Jane didn't wait to remember anything else; she didn't wait to wonder why it was as dark as the middle of the night. She tossed back the covers, slipped her feet into her slippers and jumped out of bed in a jiffy—maybe if she was dressed in time, father would let her go to the station with him!

It didn't take long to hurry from the sleeping porch to her own little room and to put on her clothes that mother had laid out the evening before. Then, when she was all dressed, she ran into her father's dressing room.

"Dadah! Please! May I go along?" she cried as she threw her arms around his neck in a surprise bear hug.

"Well, who's here!" exclaimed father, most delightfully surprised, "my *little girl!* Now I wonder what in the world you are up so early for?"

"For going to the station with you to get my grandfather and grandmother," laughed Mary Jane, "that's what I'm up so early for!"

"All right, Pussy," replied Mr. Merrill as he slipped into his coat, "I'll be glad to have your company but remember, I didn't wake you up! You know I promised mother that you were to have all the sleep you needed."

"I remember," said Mary Jane, laughing at the thought of the talk she and mother had had the night before and how mother had declared that father would be gone to the station long, *long* before little girls would be awake! "I'll tell her you didn't wake me,"

Mary Jane promised. "I'll tell her that I just waked up all by myself!"

Mr. Merrill helped Mary Jane into her heavy warm coat, for the early morning air was cold, and then she put on her cap and mittens and they went out to the garage.

But even though they tried hard to be quiet, the automobile didn't understand being still and it sputtered and pounded in getting started. As Mary Jane and her father drove out of the alley they heard Alice calling, "Wait! Wait! I want to go along!" Evidently she had been wakened by the noisy car. Trains don't wait, though, so neither could Mr. Merrill and Mary Jane, they had to hurry on if they were to be at the station when grandmother's train was due.

For a wonder (holiday trains are often late you know) this particular train was exactly on time. It pulled into the station just one minute after Mr. Merrill and Mary Jane

arrived and oh, dear, such joy as there was when Mary Jane saw her two much loved grandparents! They kissed her and exclaimed over how much she had grown and how big and wise she looked and she kissed them and had such a big lump of gladness in her throat that, really, she couldn't say a word—she could only look very, very happy. But that seemed to satisfy grandmother better than a lot of talking.

She snuggled her little girl tight as they sat in the big back seat of the car and she tucked the robe around with more care than was really necessary.

"How about kindergarten?" asked grandfather as they started off for home.

"It's wonderful, Grandfather, just wonderful!" exclaimed Mary Jane and suddenly finding her voice she told them all about it—about the Hallowe'en party and Leander and the dressing up costumes and kind Miss Lynn and everything. She talked till they

drove up to their own house and saw Alice come running out to meet them.

Then there was more kissing and talking by every one all at once and before folks knew it, the travelers were in the house and upstairs in their rooms and downstairs again and eating mother's good hot breakfast—the time went just that quickly it seemed.

After breakfast Amanda, who was engaged to help for the day, tended to the morning work so both girls, and their mother too, were free to watch grandmother unpack her bag and pass around the surprises she had brought, and to enjoy seeing the grandfather unpack the hamper of goodies he had brought to them. Such wonderful apples the girls had never seen and nuts—big fat nuts that seemed just made for Thanksgiving Day and quinces and grapes and some beautiful tomatoes that he had picked before frost and had kept in his vegetable cellar by carefully wrapping each one in paper.

The girls spread all the things out on the dining room window seat and Mr. Merrill, as he looked over the display said it made him think of a county fair to see all the butter, jam, jelly and cake as well as the fruit and vegetables.

"What *are* we ever going to do with it all!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill laughingly. "We've a pantry full of goodies already! Will the things keep till we eat them up?"

"Oh, Mother!" cried Mary Jane suddenly, "I know somebody who hasn't got a pantry full of goodies! Couldn't we give them some of ours?"

"Who do you mean, dear?" asked Mrs. Merrill in surprise.

"I mean the folks who live next to 'Manda," said Mary Jane eagerly. "She told me about 'em when she was cleaning here, yesterday. They haven't any turkey or apples or potatoes or milk or oranges or

anything but just children—nine of them! And 'Manda says *he's* sick!"

"I'll have to see about this," said Mrs. Merrill quickly. "Amanda usually tells me when she knows of special need." Mrs. Merrill hurried out to the kitchen.

In a minute she was back and what she said confirmed what Mary Jane had already told.

"Yes, Mary Jane was right," she said, "and Amanda didn't tell me because she thought I had so many duties on hand it might only worry me—the idea! When we have so much—both of good things to eat and of happiness," she added softly as she looked at the welcome guests and her own happy family. "Now I don't propose to give away much that we have here," she said as she pointed to the display before them all, "but we can give away some of the nice things I had bought and enjoy grandmoth-

er's gifts ourselves. I'll get a couple of baskets and we'll all help pack."

Mr. Merrill and grandfather spread newspapers on the dining table, Mrs. Merrill brought in the two big baskets and as the girls carried in good things from the pantry grandmother packed. Such wonderful baskets as those proved to be! Full of apples, fine, rosy red ones; nuts, candy, vegetables and canned goods—soup and fruit and everything that goes to make up a good dinner. On the top of one basket Mrs. Merrill put one of her fine pumpkin pies and on the other—guess what?—one of Mary Jane's puddings! It was all done up in tissue paper and through the red ribbon that tied the paper was thrust a gorgeous big yellow chrysanthemum! Wasn't that nice and Thanksgiving-y though?

Everybody but mother went in the car to take the baskets and everybody could see

how very happy and thankful the folks who got those baskets were.

"You're a thoughtful little girl to remember others," said Grandfather Hodges approvingly as they got into the car again after making the delivery. "My own Thanksgiving dinner will taste better for knowing that they have one."

"To make it taste still better I'm going to take you for a ride out to the Glen," said Mr. Merrill.

The dark mist and fog of the early morning had long ago melted before the warm sunshine and it was a fine day for a drive. No wonder that they rode longer than they meant to—that's easy to do!

Suddenly Alice looked at her watch and exclaimed, "Dadah! Did you know that it's twelve o'clock?"

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Merrill, and he was so surprised that he had to look at his own

watch before he could believe that hers was right. "Then we'll have to fly for home!"

And "fly" they almost did—they "skimmed over the ground like the hunting hound" in the good old Thanksgiving poem and reached home at twelve-twenty—just as Mrs. Merrill was out to look for them the third time.

"Well," she exclaimed with a sigh of relief, "I'm glad to see you back! I know a couple of girls who have some work to do!"

"We'll do it in a jiffy, Mother, don't you worry!" said Alice and she and Mary Jane dropped their wraps in the hall and set to work behind the closed doors of the dining room.

They had planned to decorate the table for dinner—no wonder Mrs. Merrill was anxious for them to come. But so well had they planned it that in half an hour they called her to see that everything was ready.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill as

she saw what they had done. "I never guessed you could do so well!"

Indeed there never was a prettier Thanksgiving table. In the center was a spread out sheet of snow and here and there were set pine trees (bits of branches Alice had wired till they stood erect) making a pine forest. At one side of the forest was a small church and at the other a group of log cabins, a pioneer settlement. Walking through the forest on their way to Thanksgiving service were groups of Pilgrims in their picturesque costumes—men and women and children. Alice and Mary Jane had done all the work and planning themselves; had made the pasteboard church and house and had painted the Pilgrim figures. Then, to finish off, they had made Pilgrim place cards which Mary Jane had colored with her water color paints.

Mrs. Merrill had planned that the turkey should not be brought upon the table till

every one had seen and admired the decorations, for she thought the girls had made a decoration of real beauty and meaning.

Alice gave one last careful look to see that everything was just as it should be and then she and Mary Jane hurried off to dress for dinner. Each had a brand new dress to wear—Alice's was a dark blue sailor dress and Mary Jane's a very becoming frock of dark crimson serge made with black smocking.

At one-thirty Mrs. Merrill pulled back the dining room doors and announced dinner. None too soon either for the early breakfast and the long drive in the sunshine had given every one an appetite.

Such a dinner as it was! The best turkey, so Mr. Merrill declared, they ever had and the finest stuffing and the best cranberries and everything.

But the most fun of all came with the dessert. Mary Jane's pudding was served

on plates with the good sauce poured around the sides; and stuck up in the center of each piece of pudding was a gayly painted colonial child. Mary Jane had made them at kindergarten—each child was carrying something to the Thanksgiving feast, corn or a fowl or nuts in an old-fashioned basket—and they gave the final touch to a perfect dinner.

"Well," said Grandfather Hodges as he ate up the last bit of his pudding, "I think this dinner was worth coming a long way to eat, and I think my little girl did a whole lot to make it worth eating." Much to Mary Jane's delight, he reached over, before every one, and gave her an approving kiss!

STORM CLOUDS

IN the three days that followed Thanksgiving Day Mary Jane had so much of fun and good times that it wouldn't be possible to tell of it all. It wouldn't be possible even, to tell of the things she liked best for, really, she had such a very good time—all of the days, that she herself couldn't decide what part *was* the best! There were the rides in the car when grandfather and grandmother were shown all the lovely country around Mary Jane's home; there were the jolly times around the table when every meal lengthened out till it was twice as long as usual because there was so much to talk about; there were the shows in the attic—for much to Mary Jane's and Alice's

amazement, grandfather and grandmother both loved to dress up and they knew wonderful charades and riddles which could be acted out; and the evenings around the open fire when they roasted chestnuts grandfather had brought and toasted marshmallows and told stories of long ago. No wonder the days flew by as though they had wings!

On Saturday grandfather decided that he might do a little business that Mr. Merrill suggested to him, business that would prolong their stay at least till Tuesday.

"Then you can see my kindergarten! You can see my kindergarten!" exclaimed Mary Jane, and she jumped up and down and clapped her hands and danced, she was so happy.

"I don't know as I can," laughed grandfather, "but your grandmother can, that's certain! Think you'd like to take her?"

"Would I?" cried Mary Jane so earnestly

that they realized how very much she had wanted her grandmother to visit her school. "*Would* I?"

"Then I'll go Monday morning," said grandmother and she patted Mary Jane's hand reassuringly, "that is, dear, if you think your teacher will not mind."

"I know she won't," Mary Jane said hastily, "because I asked her—or anyway, she asked me if you were going to stay till then and I told her no, but if you did, could you come to visit, and she said yes."

"That ought to satisfy you," laughed Mrs. Merrill; "yes, I'm sure Miss Lynn will want you to come. I'll go with you and we'll stay all the morning and you can see just what a very nice kindergarten Mary Jane attends."

When Monday morning came grandfather hurried off with Mr. Merrill to attend to his business and Mrs. Merrill and grandmother dressed for the street while Alice and Mary

Jane helped Amanda with the breakfast work. A little before half after eight all four set out together for the schoolhouse.

Grandmother had never been to the school before because she had not visited the Merrill family since Alice had started in school —all the visiting had been done at grandmother's home in the country. So Alice asked them to spend a part of the morning in her room.

"But you must come to my room first," said Mary Jane, "because it's first that we have our games and stories and then, when we do things at the table, you can go to Alice's room—then you can."

"That's a good plan," agreed Mrs. Merrill. "We'll stay in your room till ten-thirty, Mary Jane, and by that time most of your work will be over. Then we'll go to Alice's room and you may come there and meet us when your room lets out at ten minutes after eleven."

Miss Lynn was very glad to have visitors, just as Mary Jane had said she would be. She gave them comfortable seats in a back corner where they could see and hear everything without being one bit in the way. Just as they got nicely settled the bell rang and kindergarten began.

Mary Jane discovered that there were two new scholars, one a pretty little girl who had big brown eyes and golden curls and whose name was Grace Elizabeth and a tall boy who Miss Lynn called Albert.

"I want you to take care of Grace Elizabeth," said Miss Lynn to Mary Jane, "because she doesn't know any one here and she needs some one to show her what we do and where we get our chairs and all about it."

"She don't need to show me anything!" exclaimed Grace Elizabeth with an independent toss of her curls. "I'll find out everything by myself."

"Maybe so," replied Miss Lynn, calmly

" 'She don't need to show me anything.' "

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ignoring the little girl's manner, "but you'll find things out much easier if you stay by Mary Jane. That's the way we do here, you see," she added in such an assured way that Grace Elizabeth was glad to sit down by Mary Jane and follow her whispered suggestions during the opening exercises.

After they had sung the "good morning" song, the children gathered around in a circle and told Miss Lynn what they had done during the vacation. Doris said she and her family had gone to the country for the day; Susan Louise proudly told of a fine dinner party her father and mother had given; Leander's family had gone on the train to the city and had spent the day there—every one had a story of good times to tell.

"Now," said Miss Lynn, when every one had had a chance to talk, "we've heard about the pleasant times you have had—and good times are nice to talk about, too, aren't they, children?—but now I am going to tell you

something that isn't about good times, not even a little bit of good times, but which I know you will want to hear about!" All the children kept very still for they could tell by their teacher's manner that she had something uncommon to say to them.

"Away off in another country, a country across the sea," continued Miss Lynn, "there are boys and girls who like good times just as you do; who have had happy days in their dear homes just as you have had this past week but who for months and years now, have had no good times and no homes—can you guess who they are?"

A dozen hands were raised! A dozen boys and girls said, "The Belgian children!"

"Yes," said Miss Lynn, "I see you know. The Belgian boys and girls and babies and many, many of the little French children are homeless and motherless. On days as cold as this," she glanced outside where a few stray snowflakes were drifting down in

spite of the bright sunshine, "they have no warm room to stay in, no mothers to welcome them when they come home and no good dinners ready to eat when they are hungry. Do you want to help them, boys and girls?"

"We?" exclaimed Susan Louise. "What can we do?"

"That's just it!" cried Miss Lynn happily. "We *can* do something and I can tell by your faces that you want to do it. See this box?" and she held up a gay red box for them to see. "That's going to be our Red Cross box and in it we are going to drop, right through this little crack in the top, all the pennies and nickels and dimes, maybe, that we can earn. We're going to earn our money by doing without something. Every time you do without some candy or popcorn and do without going to a movie, you may bring the money you save and drop it in here. Then, as soon as we get a dollar, I'll take it down to the Red Cross and they'll use it to help

take care of the little folks I've told you about.

"And wait a minute," she added as she saw several children were ready to ask questions, "that's what we can do with our money. Now, I'll tell you something we can do with our hands. We can knit coverlets for the Belgian babies who are so cold these wintry days. I'm going to give each one of you a slip. Will you please pass them now, Miss Amerion?" she said to her assistant. "You may fold this up and take it home to your mother. It tells you just how to make a strip of the coverlet (or maybe two) that we are going to make in this very room. Be sure you don't lose it! To-morrow, I shall expect to see each girl and each boy—for the boys are going to help us too, they can knit I know—to bring the knitting, well started, to kindergarten. Now we'll go on with our work."

Mary Jane slipped over to her mother and

handed her the paper then and there so she would be sure it was safe.

"May I do it, Mother?" she asked anxiously.

"Surely, dear," Mrs. Merrill whispered back. "I don't know just what it is you are to do but I'm sure Miss Lynn wouldn't ask you to do anything that was too hard. When we get home, we will read the paper and do just what it says."

So Mary Jane, reassured, went back to her classes and the morning work proceeded.

Grandmother must have enjoyed the kindergarten very much for it was with real reluctance she left at ten-thirty for Alice's room—she was very fond of little folks.

When the kindergarten was over for the morning, Mary Jane went in to Alice's room too and she felt very big and important, sitting there on a grownfolk's chair and watching the seventh grade boys and girls do their arithmetic.

At twelve o'clock they all left the building together and on the way home they talked of the Red Cross work and of what they might do to help.

"I'm glad my army sweater is most done," said Alice proudly, " 'cause my teacher says we can turn our knitting into our room and that she will give it to the Red Cross for us. We're going to see if our school can't do the most work of any school in the city!"

"Fine!" said grandmother approvingly. "I'm glad my little granddaughter can do such good work. But what puzzles me is Mary Jane! Haven't you done any knitting for the Red Cross, dear child?"

"I suppose that is my fault," said Mrs. Merrill speaking for Mary Jane, "I didn't realize that a girl as young as Mary Jane could really do much. Since you sent her the needles she has learned to knit simple things and does it well. I'm sure she'll be only too happy to start work for the Red

Cross—we'll do it this very afternoon, my dear!"

Before Mary Jane could reply or add to what her mother had said, Grace Elizabeth overtook them.

"Hello, there, Mary Jane!" she cried teasingly. "Had to stay after school, didn't you? Coming home late, ain't you? Guess you didn't like to tell who stole that block!"

Mary Jane turned to stare after the child as she ran down a side street, then she looked at her mother, puzzled.

"What did she mean, Mother?" she asked. "Who stole a block?"

"I don't know, dear," replied Mrs. Merrill quite as puzzled as Mary Jane was, "but she doesn't know, of course, that you were with us in Alice's room and she must think you had to stay after school. Did you play with blocks after we left?"

"Yes, we did," answered Mary Jane, "and when we came to put the blocks away, one

block was missing and Miss Lynn told us to look under our chairs and every place and I did and it wasn't there! But how could I tell who stole a block when nobody stole it?" she added anxiously.

"Don't you think another thing about it," said Mrs. Merrill. "Here we are at Fifth Street. Let's you and I walk ahead and start our lunch. Grandmother and Alice are talking so much they're slow-poke walkers!"

But even as Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane turned the corner, they could hear Grace Elizabeth, a half a block away, shouting, "Course you don't know who stole the block! Guess you won't come to school again! Guess you won't!"

Mary Jane, though she didn't say a word to anybody, couldn't help wondering and wondering all the afternoon and even into the night, what in the world Grace Elizabeth could have meant.

THE LOST BLOCK

AS soon as lunch was over and Alice had gone to school, grandmother, Mrs. Merrill and Mary Jane sat down on the window seat in the living room to read the directions Miss Lynn had given out.

"Why, I know what she wants!" exclaimed grandmother as soon as she glanced at the paper. "She wants you to make coverlets for the Belgian babies exactly like the ones we are making in our Aid Society—I might have known! We collect all the scraps of yarn we can find, and knit them into long strips which we make into coverlets—it's a wonder to me," she added turning to Mary Jane's mother, "that you haven't been doing this before!"

"I thought we were doing all sorts of Red

Cross work," said Mrs. Merrill, "but this is new to us here. I'm so glad Miss Lynn has started it. It will make gay bright work for the little folks to do; it will use up the scraps all of us must have and it will give the children a chance to help other children —I like that part the best of all. We'll go up to my closet this very minute and hunt out some balls of yarn. Remember the box of scraps I had after I made that slumber robe years ago?" she said to grandmother. "That must have just the kind of yarn you want."

Now if there was one thing above another that Mary Jane loved to do, it was to look over, with the help of a grown person if possible, a box of old trinkets, or pieces or scraps. There were always stories of some sort and curious things to see and to hear about. So a very happy little girl followed the two ladies up the stairs to the sewing room where Mrs. Merrill put two big paste-

board suit boxes that she brought from the hall closet.

There were balls and balls of yarn, just as Mrs. Merrill had said there would be, enough for Mary Jane and three or four other little girls, too.

"Choose the color you want to start with," said grandmother, "and I'll set it up for you, dear. It's lucky you haven't anything on your needles just now."

Mary Jane studied over the pile of gay yarn for a minute and finally chose a bright blue for a beginning. "Then I'll make a stripe of orange," she said laying that ball aside, "and then some green."

"That's good planning," said grandmother, much pleased with the little girl's taste. "I see you are going to have a strip that is not only warm but is also good to look at."

She took the bright blue ball and began casting on stitches.

"You really ought to share this yarn," she said to Mrs. Merrill, "some other child may not have as much to knit from as you have here. How about that little Dana girl next door? She'll want to knit; has her mother plenty of scraps?"

"I dare say she hasn't one," said Mrs. Merrill thoughtfully, "for if I remember rightly, Mrs. Dana told me that she had never knitted or crocheted and that she was having a dreadful time with her sweater on that account."

"Let me telephone her to come over," cried Mary Jane eagerly, "she'll want to knit and her mother doesn't know how to set up like you do, Mother dear!"

"Very well, Mary Jane," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "that's a good idea. You telephone her to come over right away and by that time grandmother will have your work ready for you."

Mary Jane, happy to have her little friend

share the fun she was having, ran gayly down the stairs to the telephone.

"Doris says Grace Elizabeth is over to her house," reported Mary Jane, as she returned to the room a few minutes later, "and they're playing and anyway she wouldn't *think* of coming over to my house any more—she guesses I know why. What does she mean, Mother?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine," replied Mrs. Merrill, much puzzled at the message, "have you and Doris had a quarrel?"

"*No-o-o*, Mother," said Mary Jane with a positive shake of her hand, "you know we don't quarrel—Doris always plays so nice."

"Did you play this morning at kindergarten—I didn't notice," asked Mrs. Merrill.

"Well, we didn't play *specially*," admitted Mary Jane, "but we smiled and she didn't smile over the telephone, I could tell she didn't 'cause her voice wasn't smily."

"Well, think no more about it, dear," ad-

vised Mrs. Merrill, "it's just some funny notion and it will blow over quickly if you pay no attention."

"It's something to do with that new little Grace Elizabeth," said grandmother who though she had said nothing was much interested. "That child is pretty as a picture but she has mischief in her brown eyes, you can tell that at a glance. Do you know who she is?"

"No," replied Mrs. Merrill, "I never saw or heard of her before. Her family must be new in the city. But this isn't knitting," she added, briskly, as she saw that Mary Jane was very much bothered by the turn of affairs. "Mary Jane, you take the work grandmother has set up—you see it's just plain knitting, twenty-five stitches to the row—and we'll go back downstairs where grandmother and I left our socks and then we'll all sit before the big fire father built

us this noon and we'll have an old-fashioned afternoon at knitting."

The afternoon went so pleasantly that Mary Jane quite forgot about the puzzle of Doris's refusal to come over and about Grace Elizabeth, forgot till Alice came home from school. Then she was sharply reminded.

"What's this about Mary Jane being a thief and being expelled from school?" demanded Alice as she rushed into the room. "What did she do, Mother?"

"What *is* the child talking about?" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill. "Mary Jane isn't a thief, Alice, you know she wouldn't take a pin that didn't belong to her! What makes you talk so?"

"I'm not talking so, Mother," said Alice, almost tearfully, "it's the girls and they all talked to me about it."

"When?" asked Mrs. Merrill.

"At recess," answered Alice.

"All during recess?" asked Mrs. Merrill.

"Well—no," replied Alice thoughtfully, "I guess it wasn't at the beginning of recess but it was most of the time."

"I think I begin to see," said Mrs. Merrill. "Mary Jane, did you have anything to say to that new little girl after I left the room?"

"You mean Grace Elizabeth?" asked Mary Jane. "Well—I guess I told her she didn't put her blocks away good like Miss Lynn told us to, and should I help her and she said no, she could do it just as well as I could and I should watch my own blocks or I'd be sorry."

"Just as I thought," commented Mrs. Merrill.

"Has she any sister in your room or who plays with your group at recess?" Mrs. Merrill asked of Alice.

"Yes, she has, Mother," replied Alice, "and she's the *prettiest* girl you ever saw!

Yellow curls, Mother, just like a story-book princess and brown eyes and—"

"And a liking for mischief just like a story-book girl, if I'm not mistaken," laughed Mrs. Merrill. "Well, who ever these new little folks are, they're evidently not used to our ways here. They think they can have fun by making trouble for others, but we know better, don't we? Think no more about it, girlies. The lost block will turn up; Doris will get over her notion and everything will come out all right—you just see if it doesn't! Now let's have a cup of tea."

Two old friends of Mrs. Merrill's came in just then to meet Mrs. Hodges and by the time they had gone Mr. Merrill and grandfather came home for dinner and so it was quite natural that the matter of the lost block and the names she had been called should slip from Mary Jane's mind.

That evening after dinner, as they all sat round the fire knitting and talking and lis-

tening to grandfather's tales, Mary Jane's ball of yarn kept running away and running away. First she put it on her lap—and away it rolled. Then she put it on grandfather's lap (he was sitting next to her)—and it rolled away. Then she laid it on a footstool close by and it rolled away just the same. And as she didn't want the bright colored yarn to be soiled, she must chase it up each time; and really, she began to think she was doing more chasing than knitting!

"Why don't you put it in the pocket of your smock?" asked Alice. "That's where I keep my ball. The pocket is plenty big and then the ball doesn't run away."

Much pleased with the suggestion, Mary Jane picked up her ball of orange colored yarn and put it in the right hand pocket of her smock and as she put it in, she felt something hard in her pocket.

"Why—what—why—why," she stam-

mered wonderingly, "how did that get *there?*"

"How did what get there?" asked Mrs. Merrill laughingly.

"How did that block get in my pocket?" demanded Mary Jane and she pulled a good sized triangular block *out of her pocket!*

"Is that the block that was missing at kindergarten?" asked grandmother.

Mary Jane nodded. "But it wasn't from my box," she added, "'cause my blocks were all there! It was from Grace Elizabeth's box, one was gone. How did it get in my pocket?" insisted Mary Jane, "and is that the reason Grace Elizabeth called me a thief and Doris won't play with me?"

"What's this!" exclaimed Mr. Merrill. "What's this!"

"Nothing at all dear, now," replied Mrs. Merrill calmly. "There's a new little girl

at school and she doesn't quite understand the kindergarten ways and I *suspect* that she slipped that block into Mary Jane's pocket to tease her. I think I'll call up Miss Lynn and tell her that the block will be back in the morning."

Before she got to the phone the bell rang and Mrs. Dana came in. "I hope you understood I wasn't home this afternoon when that new little girl was at our house—had I been there of course Doris wouldn't have talked as I understood she did to Mary Jane. It seems that those new little girls—those pretty brown eyed ones you saw this morning," she added to Mrs. Merrill, "have just moved here and as they have no mother, we will all have to work together to teach them how to play with little folks and what a good time really is—they seem to think that the only way to have fun is to make mischief. Did you know that little Grace Elizabeth dropped a block in Mary Jane's

pocket this morning and then her sister told every one she could get hold of that Mary Jane was a thief?"

"I didn't *know*, but I suspected as much because we just found the block," replied Mrs. Merrill. "What shall we do about it?"

"Never have anything more to do with the child!" exclaimed Mr. Merrill earnestly.

"But she lives close by and we can't help having something to do with her," objected Mrs. Dana.

"I know a better way," said Mrs. Merrill as she put her arm around her own little girl, "we'll show her how good times are made. We'll have her play with us till she learns. Mary Jane, after you've given the block back to Miss Lynn in the morning (and you needn't say a word to her except that you found it in your pocket where it must have slipped) you speak to Grace Elizabeth just as though you didn't know all this we have been talking and you ask her to come over

and play at your house in the afternoon. We'll make friends with her, you just see if we don't! We'll give her a good time!"

And so they did. Of course there was no sudden change in Grace Elizabeth or her sister—things don't happen that way. But as they were more and more in the Merrills' happy home, they learned better ways of playing and kind ways to treat their friends and they never again called Mary Jane a thief!

SHOPPING FOR CHRISTMAS

ONE afternoon about a week after Grandfather and Grandmother Hodges had gone back to their home, Mary Jane stood by the living room window watching the snowflakes fall tumbling, tumbling down to earth. So fast did they come that the house and trees across the street were almost covered up like a picture on a blackboard is covered up when some one rubs wide white chalk marks over it. The pine trees in Doris's yard bent down with their heavy burden of whiteness and even the leafless little mulberry tree, at the end of the Merrill front walk had a load of snow on every bare branch and twig.

"Looks like the weather man was trimming Christmas trees," laughed Mary Jane glee-

fully, for she loved snow, "only he's lots ahead of time!"

"Not so much as you might think," replied Mrs. Merrill who was sewing near the window. "How long do you think it is till Christmas?"

Mary Jane thought a minute. "Oh, about —about a long time. A little long time but not a big long time because we're making things for Christmas already in kindergarten."

"You're wrong," laughed Mrs. Merrill, "it isn't even a 'little long time.' Christmas is two weeks from to-day!"

"Really, Mother!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "then I must go and buy—" she clapped her hand over her mouth just in time to keep the next words in! Not for anything would she have mother find out that up in the top drawer of Mary Jane's dresser, tucked under the ribbons where it never would be seen, was a tiny purse into which Mary Jane had

put the fifty-five cents she had earned picking berries at grandmother's and with which she meant to buy her mother's Christmas gift!

But Mrs. Merrill didn't seem to notice the sudden stop in Mary Jane's talk—maybe because she was so busy thinking herself.

"I've been wanting to talk to you about Christmas this year, Mary Jane," she said. "You know this year is different from all other years that any of us can remember. Although I keep all talk of war from you as much as I can, for little girls of five cannot understand it as we older folks do, still it would be wrong for me to keep from you all the suffering that other little children have and to let you go right along having pretty presents and candy and all the things we used to enjoy at Christmas."

"I know about it!" exclaimed Mary Jane eagerly, "'cause we talk about it at kinder-

garten. We bring our clothes, old ones, you know I took some, Mother dear, and our pennies and our knitting."

"I know you do, dear," said Mrs. Merrill approvingly, "and that's fine work for little folks. But now about Christmas—what do you think about it?"

"I think—" began Mary Jane slowly, "and I have been thinking 'bout it, Mother, but I didn't know it was only two weeks, I think I'd like to give the things I would have, to little folks who haven't a nice home like mine. Only how would we give it, Mother?"

"Father and I talked it over last evening," said Mrs. Merrill, "and we thought that if you and Alice were willing, we would take half the money that we usually spend on your Christmas (and that won't be so very much I'm sorry to say for we don't spend a lot at best) and give it to the little orphans across the sea—it's pretty late but if father

sends a check, to-night, to New York, perhaps it will be in time."

"And what about the other half, Mother?" questioned Mary Jane. Mrs. Merrill could tell by the little girl's shining eyes that she had some plan of her own.

"What do *you* think about it?" replied Mrs. Merrill.

"I think I'll have a party if you don't mind, Mother," said Mary Jane and she went right along talking eagerly and paid no attention to her mother's surprised and a bit disappointed face. "A real party, a Christmas party and guess who I'd invite?"

Mrs. Merrill shook her head.

"I'd ask all the children in that family we took a Thanksgiving dinner to—all of them! They's seven 'cause two is too grown up to come to my party 'Manda says," continued the little girl, "and I'd have a tree and candy and everything and mittens—'Manda says they's no mittens in the whole family!"

"Have you been talking about this to Amanda?" asked Mrs. Merrill, much pleased to know that Mary Jane had taken thought for others.

"Oh, yes, lots," said Mary Jane calmly, "and I was trying and trying to think last night 'fore I went to sleep how I could ever get some money to make a party for them. But now I know and if you don't mind, Mother, let's spend my Christmas money that way!"

"What will you do about presents for yourself?" questioned Mrs. Merrill.

"Not have any," said Mary Jane promptly, and, just as she spoke she thought about that fifty-five cents that she had earned and with which she had planned, for weeks to buy her mother a present! What should she do?

"I'll tell you what we might do," said Mrs. Merrill, for she could see that some sudden thought troubled Mary Jane, "let's make a

rule that each may give the other one thing that is the work of our own hands. That will give an expression of love and still not take too much from our work for others outside our own family. How about that?"

Mary Jane thought that was a fine plan and she decided to talk to her father that very evening and ask him to help her shop—for surely a gift bought with money earned with her own hands as that berry money was, would be a gift of one's own if anything was!

Mrs. Merrill got a pencil and paper and together she and Mary Jane made out a list of the little folks they would invite. There were ten altogether Mary Jane said, seven in one family and three in another. Mrs. Merrill thought she could guess the sizes for mittens and stockings and warm, knitted caps.

"And Alice will help us make candy, I know she will," said Mary Jane. "We'll

stuff dates with nuts—that won't take much sugar, Mother, and we'll make maple sugar candy and honey candy!"

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "and while you girls are planning the trimmings I think I'll make a real dinner for them. Turkey and stuffings and potatoes and 'filling' things such as they are not used to! We'll have them for dinner at twelve o'clock on Christmas Day. Then they can have the tree, our gifts and everything and get back home before dark. Won't it be fun, Mary Jane!" Mrs. Merrill was as excited and eager as her little girl.

After that there were busy days at the Merrill household. There were all the gifts for their little guests to plan and to buy and to tie up in gay parcels. There was the dinner to plan and the candy and goodies to make and to pack away in oiled paper in a stone jar till they were needed. And Christmas cookies—made this year out of honey

to save the sugar—to make; the girls tied up neat little white paper packages of cookies, six in each package for the little guests to take home as souvenirs. Oh, there was plenty to do so that every afternoon was full to the brim of busy-ness and happiness.

One noon, just about five days before Christmas, Mr. Merrill said at lunch, "I think I'd like to have Mary Jane go with me this afternoon if you can spare her. She's been working so hard she needs a bit of fresh air on a fine wintry day like this. I'm going to do a lot of errands and if she sits in the car, I'll have good company."

"Certainly!" said Mrs. Merrill heartily, "she has all her work in fine shape anyway—such a worker as you are, Mary Jane! I'll be glad to have her go."

"She never suspected a minute!" giggled Mary Jane as her father tucked her into the car a few minutes later, "that we were going to buy her Christmas!"

"That's because we're so clever!" admitted father, proudly. "Now where do you want to go, Pussy?"

"I want to go to the place where they have knitting things," answered Mary Jane promptly for she had everything planned, "and I've thirty cents to spend."

"Thirty cents," exclaimed Mr. Merrill, "I thought you said you had earned fifty-five cents!"

"Yes, I did," said Mary Jane, "only I gave twenty-five cents to the grocery man and he's going to save me ten of the best two-for-a-nickel candy canes to give to the children at our party. 'Cause, you know, Dadah, Christmas without candy canes just isn't a real Christmas—anyway not a Christmas party, it isn't."

"To be sure!" agreed Mr. Merrill, and he didn't say anything more for a minute; his heart was too full of happiness—because he

had such a thoughtful little daughter—to talk just then.

"So I've this to spend for mother," added Mary Jane as she proudly displayed a quarter and a nickel.

"We'll find the knitting counter first thing," said Mr. Merrill as he stopped the car in front of the biggest store.

If he had gone to that counter all by himself, Mr. Merrill wouldn't have had an idea what to buy, he was certain of that. Not so Mary Jane. She had thought so much about her gift that it was easy to forget herself and to go straight to business.

"I want a thing, a thing with two places in it," she said to the saleswoman, "that ladies put on the ends of their knitting needles to keep them from sticking holes in bags."

"Certainly," said the saleswoman, who much to Mr. Merrill's surprise seemed to

understand at once, "we have many kinds."

She set a tray out in front of them and Mary Jane's eyes sparkled as she saw just what she wanted.

"It's going to be hard to decide which to buy," said father.

But it wasn't as hard as first appeared for many of the needle holders were more expensive than a little girl could buy, some cost as much as a dollar.

"How much is that?" asked Mary Jane pointing to a modest white holder that was trimmed with a narrow rim of pink enamel.

"Thirty cents," replied the saleswoman, "and it does just as well as the more expensive."

"Goody!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "that's just how much I've got to spend. I'll take that one please," she added with dignity, and she laid her money on the counter.

"Shall I send it out?" asked the saleswoman.

"Oh, no!" cried Mary Jane, "I'll take it 'cause it's for my mother and she might see!"

"Then if it's for your mother," said the woman, much interested, "you'll want it in a pretty Christmas box. Wait a minute and I'll fix it for you."

When she returned a few minutes later, Mary Jane took the neatly wrapped box and tucked it carefully away in her coat pocket.

"Now," said father, as they came out to where the car was standing, "I guess all the important work for Christmas is finished. Suppose we take a spin before I put you on the car for home."

Mary Jane laughed delightedly. All the important work for Christmas *was* done, true enough for that very noon she had brought home from kindergarten, in the same pocket where mother's gift now lay, a handsome stamp box that she had cut and made and tinted with her own hands for Dadah's

Christmas gift! Weren't Christmas secrets the very most fun of anything? Here was Dadah—thinking that he knew so much and never guessing that a stamp box and two hand knitted wash cloths were hidden away at home!

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

CHRISTMAS came on Tuesday that year and school closed the Friday before. So there were two whole days, Saturday and Monday, for finishing up work for the party. The two girls and their mother worked like beavers for there was much to do. The house must be set in order; the last of the cooking and baking done; popcorn popped and strung for the tree, greens put up in the living and dining rooms and candies that couldn't be made beforehand made and put in boxes.

By four o'clock Monday afternoon all was ready and two happy little girls ran to the door to meet their father when he came home early to "set up" the tree.

"I think there just never was any little girl as happy as me!" exclaimed Mary Jane a

few minutes later as she trailed along behind her father and Alice who were carrying the tree into the living room. "The tree smells good and the house smells good and the kitchen (here she sniffed gayly) smells wonderful, Mother! And out of doors it's beginning to snow just like it ought to and I'm so happy in my heart!"

"And my little girl doesn't miss the presents?" questioned Mrs. Merrill.

Mary Jane shook her head happily, "Didn't even think 'bout them, Mother," she replied; "giving things is the most fun—and we're having the best time we ever had!"

"I think so too," said Mrs. Merrill and she gathered her little girl into her arms and kissed her almost reverently. "And now," she added, with a return to gayety, "you take this box of ornaments and as soon as father has the tree in place, you may begin trimming it. You may put everything in this box on it all by yourself."

Mary Jane felt the most grown up at that minute that she ever in her life had felt. For always before she had watched while the tree was set up and then, as soon as dinner was over she had been hurried off to bed. And while she had slept, the tree had been magically trimmed. This year it had been decided that in as much as Mary Jane was big enough to give some of her Christmas to poor children who had none, she must also be big enough to have the fun of trimming the tree. So it was planned to trim it before dinner.

As she entered the living room she saw Alice holding the tree straight while her father strung wires to steady it.

"Can I help, Dadah?" she asked.

"Surely, Pussy," he replied, "I was just wishing you were here. Hand me that hammer and then bring me some more wire. There, now, see if it will wiggle, Alice.

No-o, then we're all right—go ahead with your trimmings, young ladies!"

The girls went to work in a jiffy. Mary Jane put on all the things she found in her box, golden fairies and stars and pink and yellow and blue balls and a few strings of beads. Alice had her box too, and worked a little higher up because she was taller so she didn't get a bit in Mary Jane's way. While the girls trimmed the lower branches Mr. Merrill climbed onto the step-ladder and, with the help of Mrs. Merrill who handed him ornaments as fast as he needed them, he trimmed the high up branches.

"Now, then," said Mrs. Merrill, when it was nearly done, "let's stop and have dinner. I know you're all hungry. Then after dinner we can put on the tinsel and lay the presents around the foot and everything will be ready for the party."

"And hang up our stockings," added Mary Jane, "don't forget that!"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill in dismay, "I thought we weren't going to have any presents this year!"

"Oh, I know that," laughed the little girl, "but you can put *something* in stockings—an orange or a banana or some nuts or something like that—it wouldn't be Christmas without a stocking hung up!"

"Sure enough it wouldn't," agreed Mrs. Merrill, "and we'll hang them by the fireplace just as usual."

After a jolly dinner the tree was finished, the stockings hung and the presents for the little guests of the morrow, laid around the tree. Then everybody went upstairs.

"I don't see how I'm going to do it," said Mary Jane to herself as she reached into her drawer for about the thousandth time and felt of the three parcels she had hidden there.

"If I go down to the living room now, they'll be sure to hear. I guess I'll just have to go to bed and then stay awake till everybody else is asleep—that's just what I'll have to do!" This was the first year she had ever given presents of her very own to homefolks and she didn't want them to guess what she was doing—not even father, whose help she had had to ask in purchasing her mother's gift, should know how it was to be given.

So she undressed and climbed into bed, taking with her her little felt slippers. "If I put them under the pillow they won't be cold when I get up," she thought, wisely.

Presently Mrs. Merrill came out on the sleeping porch for a good-night kiss and chat and soon after that Mr. Merrill came to see that the rubber cover which would keep off the snow was well over her bed, and to tell her good-night.

"Now they'll soon come to bed, soon come," she thought, "and then as soon as they

get to sleep I'll go downstairs with my presents."

But dear me, minutes seemed hours and still they didn't come. Mary Jane said over all the little rhymes she knew, she pinched herself and she counted the stars she could see and still they didn't come * * *

Suddenly she sat straight up in bed and looked about her. There, each in his or her own bed were dadah and mother and Alice —she must have been to sleep! Lucky that she waked up before morning, wasn't it?

She put on her slippers and hopped out of bed in a jiffy and with never a thought of fear she crept noiselessly into the deserted, dark house and to her room. It wasn't hard to find the presents in her drawer—she had laid them on the very top. She held them tight in her arms and, grasping the bannister for safety, she crept down the wide, dark front stairway. Into the living room—she would have known that anywhere in spite of

the dark for the Christmas tree sent its good, woodsy fragrance to her the minute she opened the door—and over to the fireplace where the stockings hung.

In the darkness she reached out and touched one—it was full! She felt again, there they were, one, two, three, four and hers, her very own, was the one that was full! But there wasn't time to stop to think of that now. She felt for her mother's and put her present in; then for her father's and then Alice's and in that she put a pretty little handkerchief sachet she had made at school. Then, her work ended, she turned and ran as fast as ever she could, out of the room, up the dark stairs and out onto the star-lit porch and into her own still warm bed. My, but she was glad that was done!

It wasn't till after she was all snuggled down under the covers again that she happened to think, "Why I was downstairs all by myself and I wasn't afraid!"

Christmas morning the Merrill family were up betimes because there was much of fun and work to be done. The turkey must be baked and the table set and both girls were to go with Mr. Merrill at twelve o'clock to bring their little guests to the feast.

"Let's open our stockings right after breakfast," suggested Alice.

"Yes, let's," said Mary Jane who thought she never, never, *never* could wait even that long to see what her mother would say about the gift.

So they hurried through breakfast, and really they were all just as excited and as happy as if they expected to find a ship load of beautiful gifts in the next room, and then Mr. Merrill read them the story of the Christ Child—a time honored and very beautiful custom in their family—and then they opened the doors of the living room and went in.

"You look at yours, Mother dear," suggested Mary Jane.

Mrs. Merrill reached her hand in to her stocking, and there, on the top of two other packages, one from Mr. Merrill and one from Alice, was a neat little package tied with Christmas ribbon.

"What in the world is this?" she said wonderingly as she untied it. But she had not long to wonder for first thing inside she found a little card on which was written painstakingly and with the help of Miss Lynn, "Merry Christmas from Mary Jane to Mother!" And right underneath the card was the little box containing the knitting holders.

Was Mrs. Merrill pleased? *Was* she! She gave one glance at the pretty gift and then she picked her little girl up and set her in her lap and kissed her and thanked her and heard, for the first time, all about the

berrying and the saving of the precious nickels and the dividing them with the poor children ("the candy canes came last night, Mother dear, only I hid them so you wouldn't see") and about the shopping trip with father and everything.

"But how did you get them into my stocking?" asked Mrs. Merrill when Mary Jane came to the end of the story.

"Oh," and Mary Jane laughed at the remembrance, "I meant to stay awake till after you were in bed but I forgot, I guess, so I waked me up in the middle of the night and came down and put 'em in."

By that time, father and Alice had found their gifts and were proudly displaying them to Mrs. Merrill and thanking Mary Jane.

"Nobody can call you a 'fraidy,' laughed Mr. Merrill, "if they do just tell them about last night. I tell you I'm proud to have a little girl smart enough to make

this"—and he held up his gift—"and brave enough to come downstairs and put it in my stocking!"

"But you must look in yours, dear child," said Mrs. Merrill as she let Mary Jane slip down from her knee.

Mary Jane had forgotten all about hers. She rushed over and looked and there—would you believe it? it had three, yes *three* great big beautiful candy canes sticking right out at the top! A cinnamon cane, a peppermint cane and a big yellow lemon cane!

"Don't worry, Pussy," laughed her father as he saw her eyes grow big, "they're made out of the kind of sugar we can spare, so you may eat all you wish! Now look some more."

So Mary Jane looked; and found a beautiful little knitting bag just like grown up folks' bags and rolled up neatly so it would go in the stocking and a doll dress for her best doll (from Alice, who had taken pity on

the doll so sadly neglected since Mary Jane had been in kindergarten!) and a rope on the end of which was tied a note. "Follow me to my other end," the note said, "and you will find what you will find." Mary Jane followed and over in the far corner of the room she discovered a handsome red sled, from father. "And of course the bag was from you, Mother dear," she said as she gave each one a "thankyou" kiss.

Other gifts, all very simple ones were opened and there's no telling how long the family would have spent there had not the back door bell rung just then.

"Thought maybe you alls would like some help this mornin'," said Amanda's kind voice, "so I jest hurried myself over to lend a hand!"

"Indeed, we'll be glad to have you here," exclaimed Mrs. Merrill heartily, "and girls look! It's nine already!"

Such a scrambling as there was after that.

Mr. Merrill helped tidy the living room of its papers and ribbons; the girls cleared the breakfast table and made the beds and then, while Mrs. Merrill got the turkey in to bake and Amanda cleaned the bathroom, they set the table for dinner. They had planned their decorations beforehand so all they had to do now was to put them in place. There was an oblong mirror which was laid in the middle of the table to represent a lake. The frame was covered with cotton (for snow) and around on the snow were set tiny pine trees about six or eight inches tall wired so they stood straight. On these little trees were tiny trimmings—bells and balls made of bright bits of paper, and little ravelings of tinsel and threads of cotton. In the center of the "lake" was a "boat" made out of pasteboard and covered with cotton (snow) and in this "boat" was a small favor for each guest. After the center was fixed then it

was but the work of a few minutes to put on the silver and dishes and napkins and the table was ready.

At eleven-thirty the girls and Mr. Merrill went for their guests.

It was a good thing Mrs. Merrill had planned to have the dinner first thing for the ten little people were so shy and uncomfortable when they first came that they could hardly say a word! But by the time every one had had two helpings of turkey and two or three helpings of mashed potatoes and gravy ("They must have been hollow, the poor little things," thought Mrs. Merrill) they forgot to feel timid and by the time the dessert of ice cream and Christmas cookies was eaten and the doors thrown open into the living room, every one, even the little one year old, felt happy and at home.

There was a jolly afternoon in that household, you may be sure! The children opened

the bundles under the tree and tried on mittens and caps and found everything just right; they ate popcorn and played "Going to Jerusalem" and "Who Comes There" and "Twenty Questions" (of course the littlest couldn't play that but they found plenty to do just the same) and then Mrs. Merrill gathered them around the fire and told them stories till they were rested and ready to play some more.

All too soon half past four came and it was time for the guests to be taken home.

When Mary Jane and Alice got back from taking the little people home, Mary Jane stood before the fire warming her hands and thinking over the day.

"Do you know, Mother," she said at last, "I think we've had the best Christmas we ever had and I can think of something I'd like to say."

"Tell us, dear," said Mrs. Merrill softly.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

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R L

"It's something I learned a long time ago, but I only just know it now," said the little girl, " 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

PLANS FOR THE SOUTHLAND

WITH fun and frolic and rides on the new sled and knitting by the fire and visits to little friends and quiet hours of play with her dolls, Mary Jane's vacation soon passed and the time came to go to school again. Much as Mary Jane loved her home, she loved her school too and she liked to think she was big enough to go out and learn things just as Alice did.

So it was a happy little girl who, on the morning school began, got up early and started off for kindergarten.

When she came home at noon she reported that the next day was "visiting" day and that each pupil was allowed to bring a guest.

"A really truly guest?" asked Mrs. Mer-

rill in surprise. "Are you sure you didn't misunderstand, Mary Jane?"

"I didn't miss anything," said Mary Jane positively, " 'cause I listened to every teeny thing she said and then when she was all through I asked her could I bring Junior and she said yes I could if you were willing and you are, aren't you?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Merrill, "and if you asked her as carefully as that, it must be all right. As soon as you have had your lunch, you may go over and invite him."

"And may I stay and play with him?" asked Mary Jane.

"Surely," agreed Mrs. Merrill and to tell the truth, she was much pleased that Mary Jane wanted to play with him. Since the little girl had started to school there had been less time for play and the two children had seen very little of each other all the fall.

As soon as lunch was over Mrs. Merrill went to the curbstone with Mary Jane, for

she still was not allowed to cross that particular roadway by herself, and watched her across the street.

"Stay an hour, if you like," said Mrs. Merrill, "and then, if Junior's mother is too busy to bring you home you may phone to me and I'll come for you."

Junior was home, could go to school the next day and was glad to have some one to play with that very afternoon so the two little friends had a very happy hour. They played out of doors, making animals of snow —a cow and a horse and a dog and a lamb— though, if the truth were told, it's very likely that only they themselves knew which was which! So happily did they play that Junior's mother phoned to ask that the hour be lengthened to two and, as a matter of fact, it was most dark when Junior and his mother brought the little girl home.

Much to Mary Jane's surprise her father was at home and he and her mother were

talking busily when she came into the living room.

"Go to the kitchen, Mary Jane," said Mrs. Merrill, "and on the table you'll find an apple and three stuffed dates you may have." Mary Jane, as she turned to go as she was told, *thought* she heard her mother add, "We won't say anything about this till you are sure about it." What it was they had been talking about, she could not guess.

The next morning she and Alice went for Junior and took him to school with them.

"Now, Junior," said Mary Jane in her most motherly fashion, "don't you worry about what to do and when to do it" (Junior wasn't, but Mary Jane hadn't noticed that!), "you just watch me and I'll tell you everything." And Junior promised to watch.

All went well till "nap time." Now this "nap time" was something that is not in very common use in kindergartens but which Miss Lynn had found very helpful. Early

in the fall each child had made a tiny "pillow" about eight inches square. It was made out of gingham or some soft, bright colored goods and was stuffed with scraps and cuttings of soft cloth. Each child's pillow was marked and was kept in a certain place in the closet. On days when the children were restless, Miss Lynn had each take his or her own pillow and lay down on the floor, head on the pillow and play "go to sleep." The few minutes of quiet usually made a great difference in the children's enjoyment of the rest of the morning.

On this visitors' morning Miss Lynn and her assistant had had their hands full for, much to their surprise, there were about twenty little guests that day. (Usually there had not more than eight or ten accepted the invitation to come.) The children had become almost hilarious. So she announced that every one would take a

nap and she gave the visitors "pillows" from her own cupboard.

Junior took the "pillow" she handed him and lay down on the floor just as Mary Jane told him to do, but he didn't understand about shutting his eyes. As he lay there so still, but watching, watching, he saw Leander take his hand from his coat and slip it over the floor, half an inch at a time, closer and closer to Mary Jane. Junior stood it as long as he could but when he saw that hand almost to Mary Jane's head he could keep still no longer. He suddenly sat up on the floor and *screamed* at the top of his lungs.

Miss Lynn came running to him, and the principal in her office heard and hurried to the kindergarten room and the children all asked questions at once.

"What was it?" asked Junior when Miss Lynn finally got him to speak. "It wasn't any

it it was *him!*" And he pointed at Leander.

"Leander Lloyd!" exclaimed Miss Lynn, "what were you up to now?"

"Nothin'," said Leander, "only he's such a little fellow and she takes care of him and I thought I'd see if he'd holler if I stuck her with a pin."

The principal took Leander with her to the office and apparently she made him understand that such things were not to be—not any more; for after that he was a much kinder boy and a more thoughtful playmate.

When they had gone, Miss Lynn said, "You may put your 'pillows' in the closet, children, and then all sit down on the floor and I'll tell you a story."

A beautiful story it was too, all about the land of flowers and sunshine and summer and about a man and his followers who, years ago, left their homes over the seas and came to this country in search of the spring of eternal youth.

"My, oh, my!" thought Mary Jane as she finished the tale, "how I wish, someday when I get big, I could see that wonderful place."

Little did she guess what was to happen soon!

When she reached home that same noon, she found her father and mother in earnest talk. "Yes," Mrs. Merrill was saying as she came into the room, "I think we might as well tell her now."

"Tell her what?" asked the little girl.

"Tell her what we're planning," replied Mrs. Merrill, as she drew her daughter to her knee. "Would you like to ride on the train again, dear?"

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "are we going too?"

"Shouldn't wonder," laughed Mrs. Merrill as she lovingly reached up and straightened the mussed up hair ribbon, "it's this way, pet. Dadah has to go down South on

a business trip and he doesn't like to leave us alone here—wouldn't we miss him lots? So he's going to take us with him, all three of us. Of course we can't be together all the time because he has his business to attend to. But we can be near. And it will give us the chance I have always looked forward to of showing you and Alice the beautiful country in the South."

"And will we see the Fountain of Youth Miss Lynn told us about to-day?" asked Mary Jane eagerly.

"That very thing," said Mrs. Merrill, "and many other interesting places too—the wonderful town of St. Augustine and the old fort and the ocean and beaches and—oh, just everything wonderful that a little girl could want to see, Mary Jane!"

"Let's go now!" exclaimed Mary Jane excitedly, "let's pack our trunk and go this very day, let's!"

"Not quite so fast, Pussy," laughed Mr.

Merrill, "let's wait till next week! We haven't asked Alice yet—maybe she won't care to go!"

"Yes, she will," cried Mary Jane, "I know she will, you just see!"

"Then," said Mrs. Merrill gayly, "it's all settled. Shall we go, say a week from to-day?"

"A week from to-day suits me," agreed Mr. Merrill, "and as the girls will both learn much of both geography and history I guess we won't worry about the two weeks or so they will lose in school."

"There comes Alice," said Mary Jane who had noticed her sister coming up the walk. "Won't she be surprised when she knows that she and wes are going off on a trip?"

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